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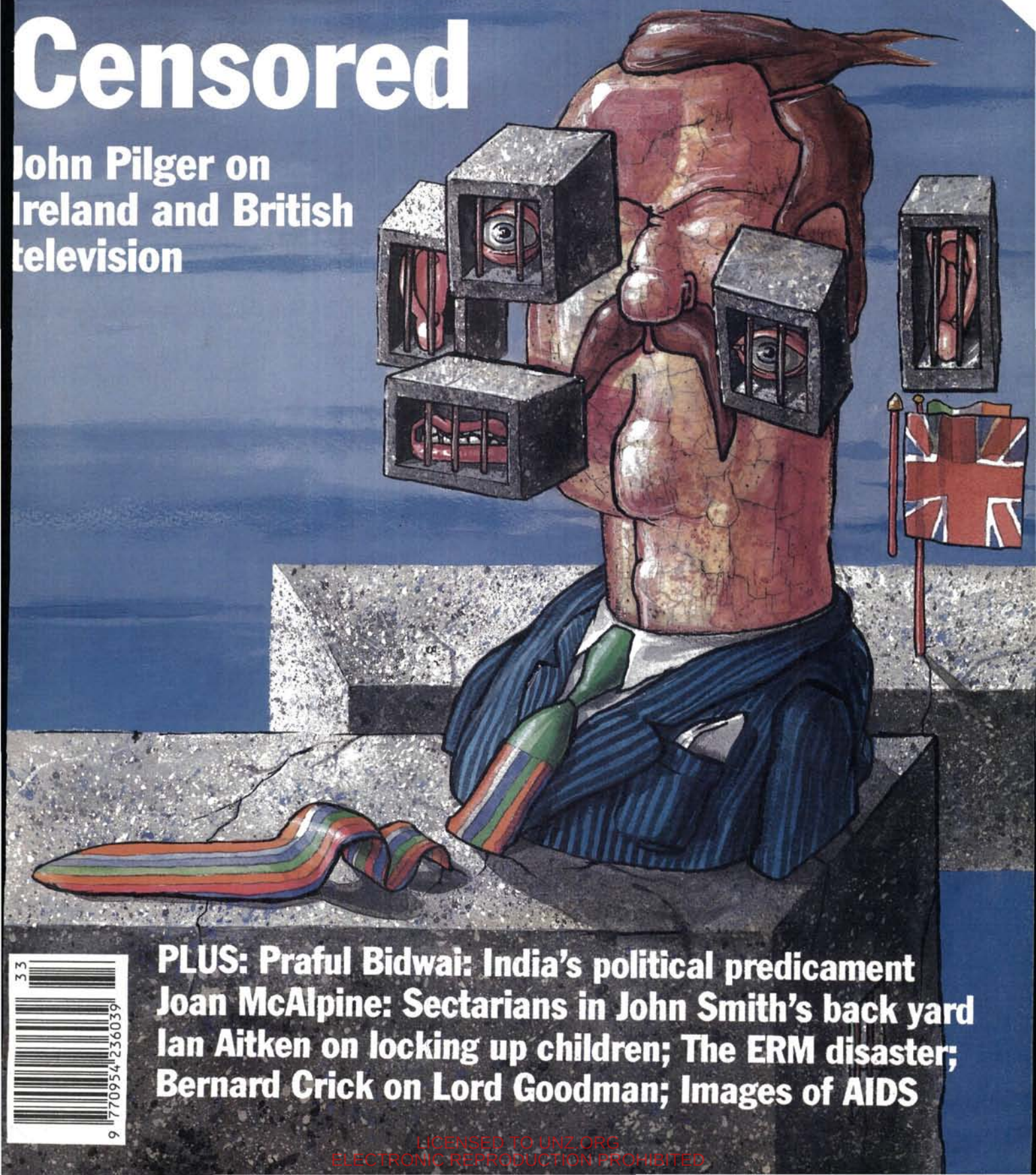

PLUS: Praful Bidwai: India's political predicament
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Ian Aitken on locking up children; The ERM disaster;
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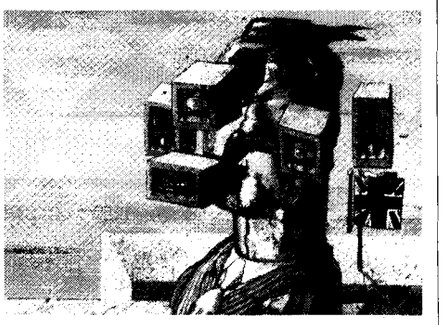

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The Autumn Collection unveiled

Orders for the Defence Fund's autumn collection "Don't think . . . Don't be surprised" limited edition T-shirt are flooding in, as are requests for the old "New Statesman Libel Tour" favourite, also available. Both come in XL size, white on black, at £7.99 plus £1 p&p.

Don't forget the Defence Fund cricket test at Huntingdon on Saturday 18 September. Everyone is welcome to watch *NSS* battle against the Huntingdon side, under the watchful umpiring eye of Ian Aitken. The Huntingdon eleven are already running into trouble; no answer has been received yet as to whether John Major has accepted the captaincy. For more details of the match, and the Defence Fund dinner at the town's Commemoration Hall the same evening (tickets £5/£8), contact our sleeper in the prime minister's constituency, Lesley Shipgood on 0480 458762.

For those readers who will be in London that weekend, Barry Norman will be introducing a Defence Fund/Camden Labour parties preview of Ken Loach's new film *Raining Stones* at 10.30 am on Sunday 19 September, at the Camden Parkway cinema. Tickets are only £5, as-yet anonymous celebrities and MPs will be in attendance—but don't let that put you off. Advance booking is recommended from the Parkway on 071 267 9662.

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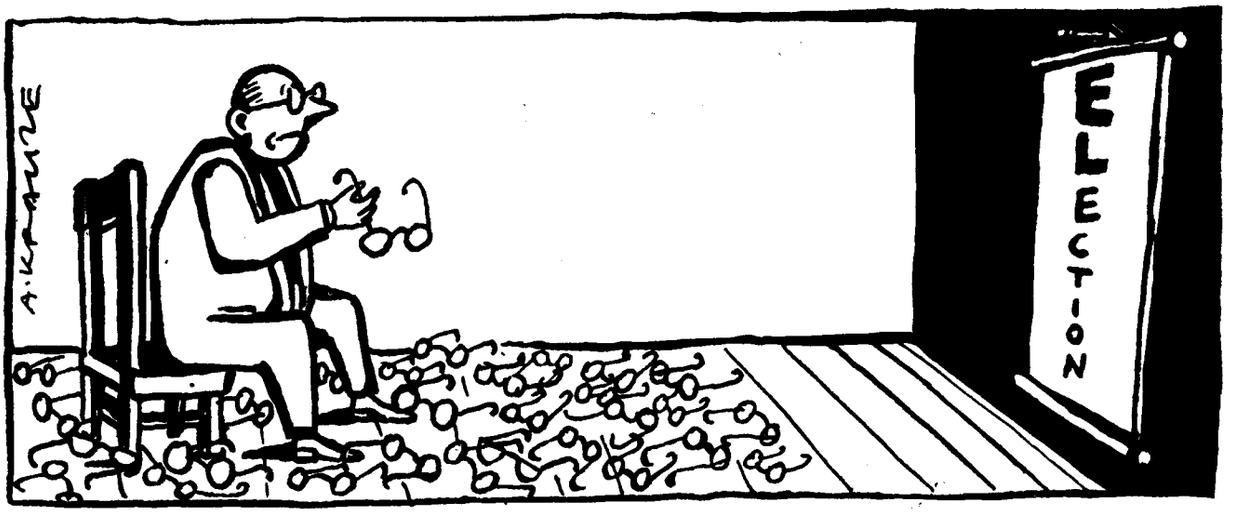

Andrzej Krauze

Labour's economic problem

Gordon Brown's speech this week, as he launched the Labour Party conference economic policy document, was the clearest indication yet that Labour has decided that its top political priority is to shed its image as a "tax and spend" party.

"Labour is not against wealth, nor will we seek to penalise it," said Brown. "Not only do we not tax for its own sake, we only tax if it increases the opportunities for individuals or for the community as a whole.

"On spending, we recognise that public services exist for one purpose—to enhance people's opportunities and prosperity. Wherever spending has become divorced from this purpose, it is wasteful and inefficient and we should cut it or eliminate it."

Brown's speech was short on detail and, typically, very careful. He did not promise that a Labour government would not put up taxes; he did not even say that Labour would not increase *direct* taxes. As far as public spending commitments are concerned, "there are none": Labour will not decide how much it wants to spend on what until the Commission on Social Justice, the non-party body set up by John Smith last year, has published its conclusions and the party has reviewed them.

Nevertheless, two things are pretty clear. First, Labour will not be fighting the next general election on anything like last year's shadow budget, with its promises of increases in pensions and child benefits paid for by the abolition of the ceiling on National Insurance contributions and a 50p top rate of tax on earnings above £30,000 a year.

If Labour does go for tax increases, they will generally not be income tax increases; to the extent that they are, they will apply only to the very rich. And, insofar as the tax and welfare systems are used for redistribution, it will be justified less in terms of achieving greater equality of outcomes than of encouraging greater equality of opportunity.

Second, Labour will not be fighting the next election on anything like the platform for Keynesian reflation advanced by Bryan Gould, Peter Hain and others on the soft left of the party. For Brown and the Labour leadership, public spending is not a good thing that encourages the growth of demand in the economy: it has to be kept firmly under control and cut where possible.

If Brown's speech left any room for doubt on this point, there is none in the document that it launched. Its familiar analysis of the failure of Britain to invest in industry and training and equally familiar proposals for "supply-side" measures to rectify this failure are accompanied by a straightforward rejection of the idea that Keynesian demand management is the key to turning round the British economy:

"Now that we live in an increasingly global economy, care must be taken to ensure that an injection of resources does not simply lead to more imports—and therefore more output in competitor countries—but increases in output and jobs here.

"The key stimulus to investment is, of course, the prospect of growing demand. To pretend that supply-side measures alone are sufficient to secure the level of investment that Britain needs is to neglect this basic fact. But to pretend that the management of demand alone can sustain high levels of employment over the long term is to misunderstand the current predicament of the British economy, which has an ever worsening deficit despite the longest recession since the war. Without creating extra capacity, expanding demand will in due course bring an even worse balance of payments and increasing inflation."

Needless to say, the Labour left is less than pleased at what it sees as Brown's kow-towing to the Tories on tax and macroeconomic policy—and they could turn out to be right. But much of Brown's "new approach" makes sense. On tax, it would be madness for Labour to risk losing another election by promising increased taxes on middle incomes. Even if the possibility is discounted that, by the time of the next election, economic recovery might just have given the Tories enough room to *cut* income tax, there are plenty of ways of raising indirect taxes, if needs be, without making the tax system more regressive.

More importantly, on macroeconomics, Brown is quite right to dismiss the possibility that plucky little Britain could go it alone with some version of the one-nation Keynesianism that underpinned the Alternative Economic Strategy of the early 1980s. The globalisation and increased mobility of capital really do make it impossible for a medium-sized nation-state, even one without a massive balance of payments deficit, significantly to boost demand without dire consequences. The last time it was tried, in France in the early eighties, it failed ignominiously—and there is every reason to believe that Britain in the late nineties would fare even worse.

The problem is that, as things stand, this leaves Labour with nothing more than its supply-side measures to distinguish itself from the government, and training and tax breaks for investment do not add up to an election-winning macroeconomic policy package, however often the mantra is repeated and however important the skills base and the tax regime are for attracting capital and jobs to Britain.

Just about the only way out is for Labour to go beyond the limits of the nation-state and to look to the European Community as the agent of an alternative macroeconomics that goes beyond the supply-side. Yet the EC merits only the briefest of mentions in *Labour's Economic Approach*, and then only as a possible forum for co-operation among nation-states. Brown still has his work cut out if he is to offer a convincing alternative.

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Mouse trapped in France

There seemed to be no limit to the European public's appetite for American imports until Euro Disney came along. Its founders can be forgiven for thinking that we would have swallowed it whole, along with Big Macs, Coca-Cola and Hollywood movies. But, less than 18 months after its opening, Euro Disney faces losses of £210 million. Defeated by the weather, and by a sad lack of visitors, the doors to the Magic Kingdom may have to close for the winter.

Mickey Mouse is hitting the bottle in an attempt to woo the crowds. Beer and wine is now on sale alongside the ice cream and soft drinks. Prices have been slashed: a cheeseburger, fries and soft drinks now costs £3 less than when Euro Disney opened; hotels are offering reductions of up to a third. The theme park is beginning to resemble one of those discount shopping centres on the edge of towns, at which "everything must go" in an end-of-line sale.

What has gone wrong? The French flatter themselves that they are more resistant to American cultural imperialism than the rest of us. In fact, they love Americana, but they know how to give it a touch of their own polish. This is what Euro Disney's executives failed to appreciate. The hermetically sealed world of the theme park did not offer the French a chance to make their own mark.

Standardisation has been the not-so-secret ingredient of America's most successful exports. Euro Disney's parent company thought that it was simply sticking to this formula. Its hotels were custom-built, its attendants were all smiles, and its rides were much the same as those in Los Angeles and Orlando. But it failed to replicate American prices. Big Macs colonised the world because they were cheap, not fancy.

In a recession, this was a costly mistake. The *franc fort*, that symbol of French national pride, did not help. Our own currency seesaws have also played a part in putting off the British tourists that Euro Disney was counting on. When it opened in Paris, the pound was so strong against the dollar that it was cheaper—and more entertaining—to see Mickey Mouse in his natural habitat. Once the pound was devalued, France in turn became expensive.

A few years ago, there was some hard lobbying going on to get Euro Disney built in Britain. Rainham Marshes in Essex was mooted as a possible location. But there would have been an almighty planning battle, in contrast to France, where the government offered Disney huge tax breaks and 5,000 acres of land for next to nothing.

Britain might have made a better fist of it than France, if the success of Alton Towers is anything to go by. Yet the derelict hulk of Battersea Power Station is a reminder that theme parks over here are not necessarily a licence to print money. The most successful tourist attractions have genuine roots in British history. The safaris and theme parks that are built around stately homes fall under the "heritage" umbrella. So do the countless attractions that have sprung up in the disused workshops of the industrial revolution.

Walt Disney drew on European legends and fairy tales for his own source material. The famous turreted castle is based on Neuschwanstein, the home of the mad Bavarian king Ludwig. In doing so, however, he stripped the stories of their menace. The dark side of Europe was reflected back squeaky clean. The Magic Kingdom might be more successful in future with *tricoteuses* and a guillotine.

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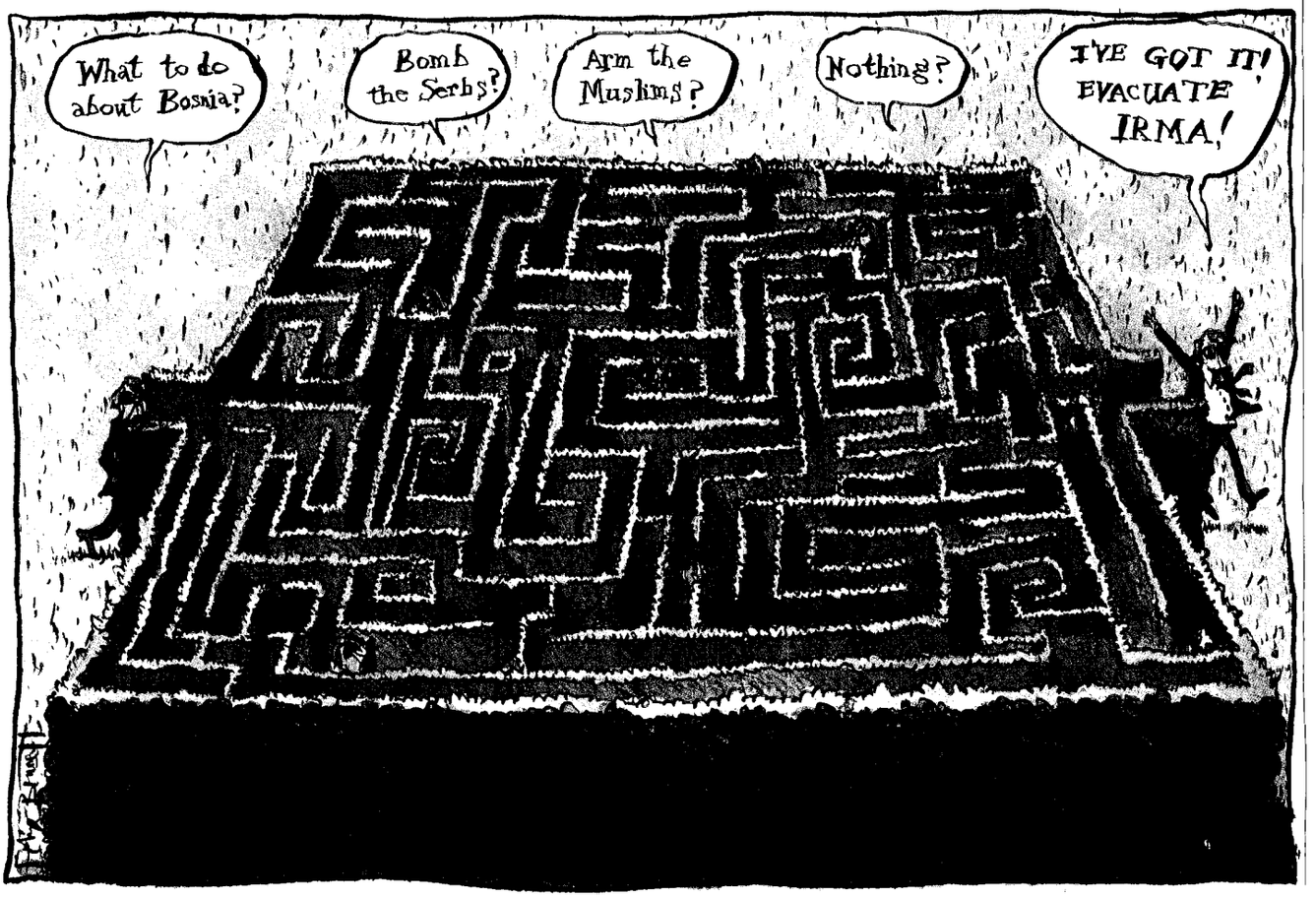

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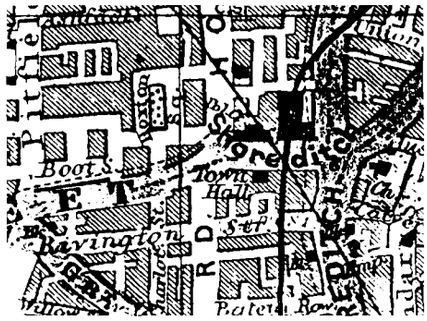

Following NSS's realisation that terrorist bombs are good for business (see our report on the bonanza for the building trade in NSS, 30 July), now comes the ultimate irony: they're good for the environment too. "The environment in the Square Mile has improved dramatically since the introduction of the traffic management scheme in the centre of the City of London," says the Corporation of London. "The number of cars travelling through the city has gone down from about 9,700 to roughly 7,200 an hour and this has had a positive effect on pollution." Indeed, the corporation gives as one reason for maintaining the barriers, bollards and surveillance teams in place: "Making life easier for the pedestrian." Orwell would have loved it.

It looks as if the *Daily Mirror* has after all, as Shoreditch predicted (30 July), thrown its weight behind Democracy Now, the parliamentary pressure group for extending Labour Party representation in Northern Ireland. Just three weeks after we spotted Mirror Group News chief executive David Montgomery hobnobbing at Democracy Now's House of Commons party, the paper is sponsoring the organisation's fringe debate (at which our own Steve Platt will be putting in an appearance) at the Labour Party conference next month. Shoreditch would like to take this opportunity to preen itself and say you read it here first.

We always knew that Salman Rushdie used to be an advertising copywriter—a traditional means, after all, of slumming it for many an embryonic literary giant. Fay Weldon, for example, achieved lasting fame for "Go To Work On An Egg". However, despite being the author of "Naughty, But Nice!", it appears that Rushdie may not have shone in the profession quite as well one might have expected. Last week's Campaign magazine contains the fascinating information that if Salman Rushdie would care to pay a "fee" to the creative director of the advertising firm Ayer, then the said creative director will "lose" some early examples of the Rushdie oeuvre stored in the company's vaults. Aside from the "verses" that graced ads for Loving Care and Nice'N'Easy, there is apparently a video of the Burnley Building Society commercial that shows two people "writhing" to the tune of the Bee Gees' hit "Staying Alive". The words of the song have been somewhat changed by Rushdie, who has added his own lyrics: "Ah, ah, ah, ah. Saving Away, Saving Away." It would, of course, be in bad taste to wonder what this astonishing talent would have come up with for Fry's Turkish Delight.

Relatively little has been heard from the Child Support Agency (CSA) since it was launched amid much fanfare earlier this year. But don't let the quiet fool you; the agency has been beavering away at its files, as PC Kevin Collins found last week. The Department of Social Security informed his wife, Sue Collins, that it was chasing her hubby up for the maintenance he should have been paying for the child he had fathered by another woman. Mrs Collins was not amused: "I was ready to stick a knife into him." PC Collins' untimely death was averted by his own enquiries, which revealed that he was only 15 years old and living in Croydon at the same time as the baby was conceived—in Plymouth. It turns out that a single mother had, indeed, named one "Kevin Collins" as the father of her child, at which the agency rustled through its records and came up with the only "Kevin Collins" that it could find; the wrong one. A rattled PC Collins is now planning to seek compensation from the agency for the cock-up, and CSA procedure for "tracing" errant fathers is currently "under review".

John Major this week announced the appointment of three new members of the Citizen's Charter Advisory Panel, the body set up not only to ensure we citizens enjoy the full fruits of all those wonderful charters the Prime Minister keeps giving us, but also doggedly to insist on constant improvements in the standards of public services covered by the charters. Dr Madsen Pirie is among the new panel members now looking after out interests. Pirie is also president of the Adam Smith Institute, the loopy group of rampant free-marketeers that, since 1979, has provided the Tories with some of their madder sell-off ideas. Shoreditch is curious to see how this will fit in with his new role as the citizen's watchdog.

Shoreditch was surprised to read in the *Mail on Sunday* last weekend, and indeed in other tabloids following its lead, a story concerning rumours of an adulterous affair between a certain head of state and a catering manageress. We were doubly flabbergasted to see the word "mistress" in the headline emblazoned on the paper's front cover. After all, *NSS* received a writ for libel, an invitation to appear in court (later withdrawn), and a final legal bill of £250,000 when we did a similar thing. Then again, Shoreditch concludes the *Mail* will not be receiving any of the aforementioned items from the Prime Minister, since the person telling the story was Clare Latimer, the catering manageress herself. The story has also been syndicated for good measure.

FOURTH ESTATE

A weekly round-up of the tabloid press

12 August: The *Sun* as the feminists' friend? "We're seriously concerned about Judge Michael Addison," exclaims its editorial. "The judge told a rapist his offence wasn't the most serious—because the victim was a woman he dated, not a stranger. *What disgraceful nonsense.* Rape is the crime women fear most. ALL rapes are serious."

But there's no doubt about the biggest story: Operation Irma. "Britain showed the world it cares last night by opening its arms to the helpless little victims of the Bosnian bloodshed," opines the *Mirror* on its front page.

13 August: The *Express* decides that it's time to have a go at claimants. "LUXURY ON DOLE SCANDAL," screams its front page. "Jobless get £2,000 rent handouts." Only well down the page does it emerge that the reason for the alleged scandal is the government's abolition of rent controls.

14 August: By now, the Operation Irma story is beginning to go a little sour. "It was hoped that more than 20 little victims of the Bosnia bloodshed whould follow for treatment in Health Service hospitals," says the *Mirror*. "But officials disclosed yesterday that only two children are among the 17 sick and wounded due to be flown to Britain."

15 August: The *News of the World* begs to differ with the consensus that only children should be airlifted from Sarajevo. "No victim is too old to be saved," it declares.

16 August: Now there's a new twist to Operation Irma. "CHILD AIRLIFT BRIBE SCANDAL," in the words of *Today*'s front-page splash, "'Soldiers are on the plane'." The *Express*, which doesn't cover the allegations, uses its leader column to fire a rare shot across John Major's bows. The Prime Minister should not even be thinking about stealing Labour's policy of raising the ceiling on National Insurance contributions, it argues: "It is political suicide. People are not so easily fooled. If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it *is* a duck. If it looks like a tax, and hurts like a tax, it is a tax."

17 August: Perhaps the government has taken the *Express*'s advice to heart: "CLARKE PLANS VAT BUDGET BOMBSHELL," claims a *Sun* headline, though the story is merely that experts believe VAT will be levied on newspapers and magazines. The *Sun* clearly doesn't like the prospect: "If newspaper readers are next in line can VAT on food and fares be far behind?" its leader asks.

18 August: Today's big question is how a family newspaper should render in headlinese the Norwegian environment minister's description of John Gummer. The *Mirror* opts for "s*!%bag", the *Star* for "drittsek (That's Norwegian for s—tbag)", the *Sun* for "s***bag" and *Today* for "DRITTSEKK". The *Mail* and *Express* demurely keep any version of the insult out of their headlines.

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Kirsty Milne endeavours to survive the fag-end of summer

August is a limbo month. Fag-end of the weather, scrag-end in the shops. Everyone bilious and fretful, and leaving the country like lemmings. Repeats on the television, rubbish in the streets: a write-off month, best spent waiting for September.

To make matters worse, there's something disorientating in the August air: like the mistral, only less glamorous. Inanimate objects declare war. Keys won't turn, and tights ladder at the slightest invitation. I make lists and then lose them; shed buttons; miss trains; and search feverishly for bits of paper that were there all along, propped up on the mantelpiece so I wouldn't forget them.

This chaotic way of living reminds me of someone, some character in literature. From Dickens, perhaps? Jerome K Jerome? No, from *Teddy Bear*, circa 1970. *Teddy Bear* came late to Lennoxtown, but it was the only comic I liked. Naturally I identified with the small female, whose name was Bare Bear—a literal description devoid of innuendo. Bare Bear was famous for dropping things, including items of clothing, as she moved from room to room. It was possible to track her progress by the trail of small objects in her wake.

I think of Bare Bear as I scrabble on the platform for my bus-pass, and know conclusively that I have left it on the tube. She'd be older now; and instead of safety pins and tissues, she'd be shedding her Switch card and her Stanley knife. It was obviously what therapists call "a coping strategy", the way Bare Bear happily ignored the paraphernalia of her life. How nice just to drop everything. But would the other bears have found her so endearing when the objects she discarded grew up with her, turning into passports and car keys and cameras?

It is a fallacy too widely accepted that Radio Four is innately conservative. In fact, the schedules contain little enclaves of adventure, like a game grandmother going white-water rafting on the sly. Some brave soul has stuck his or her neck out for *The Locker Room*, a sort of *Men's Hour*, which ended its second series on Saturday. Presented by a much-mellowed Tom Robinson, it has men sitting round discussing fatherhood, or violence, or fear of commitment. There is an inevitable bias in favour of emotionally articulate guests, as Robinson himself has acknowledged in rampant self-criticism sessions on air. To redress the balance, reporters are sent to investigate manly things such as sperm donation, fast cars and body-building.

For a woman, it's riveting: like watching nocturnal animals gambolling under infra-red light. Over the last 20 years, feminism has anatomised women exhaustively. There is nothing you cannot read about the socialisation of women, their psychology, their struggle, their place in society. All this has left men, as a gender, somewhat under-researched. The pendulum of sexual politics never quite swung their way.

There was meant to be something called the New Man, but he has been much maligned of late and seems to have gone out of fashion. He was last seen modelling an ad campaign, with his shirt off and a baby on his shoulder. A charming but irrelevant image: as politicians will tell you, any mug can deploy a baby to advantage.

It was the New Man's downfall to be adopted as a marketing mascot—a sure route to becoming a general hate figure (look at yuppies and Sloanes). At the same time, defeatists of both sexes were claiming that women don't find New Man attractive: they want a caveman in bed. (Which sounds very like permission to go on behaving like a caveman *out* of bed).

Men accordingly raced to dissociate themselves from the discredited New Man. I have friends who qualify—and I consider that a compliment—but they would be mortified by the very idea. One of them maintains that being a New Man is no more than a cynical seduction strategy: an up-market method of persuading women to take their clothes off.

I think the concept has been misunderstood. Being a New Man is not a style category, but a state of mind. It is *not* necessary to learn flower-arranging or join a men's group, and it is perfectly permissible to like football and penetrative sex.

Maybe we need a new name for the New Man. Maybe we should forget about names altogether. It's like recognising members of an obscure sect: there are so few of them about that you know one when you see one—whether he is prepared to admit it or not.

On bad days, the Citizen's Charter looks very feeble indeed. But it will have some value if it prompts people to assert themselves in situations where they would normally feel powerless to complain.

Medicine is a case in point. However much we respect and cherish our health service, it is sometimes impossible not to feel that the system is being run for the convenience of the professionals rather than the patients. I'm thinking of two incidents which took place in reputable hospitals over the past couple of weeks.

In one, a young mother was refused entry to the operating theatre where a surgeon was examining her five-month-old baby, using a local anaesthetic. She had to stand outside for 20 minutes, listening to the child screaming. By the end of the operation, mother and baby were both distraught.

The other was the case of a woman, terminally ill with cancer, waiting to go home for a last visit before returning to die in hospital. Her son came to collect her at 9am, but they had to wait until 2pm for the drugs she needed to cover the next few days. It was the son's girlfriend who eventually boiled over and got a nurse to bring the drugs at once.

I'm not pointing the finger specifically at the NHS: My mother died of cancer last year in a private hospital, where she had to endure some of the most careless and insensitive nursing I have ever witnessed (she'd been in several hospitals, so we had other places to compare it with).

Doctors and nurses are like lawyers: because some are conscientious and heroic, it doesn't mean that others are not negligent and second-rate. It takes courage for relatives to challenge the professionals—especially professionals who have power over the health and comfort of someone you love. The Association of Community Health Councils recently noted that the Patients' Charter was raising expectations. If it also promotes a culture of complaint—not tortuous official remonstrance, but on-the-spot challenges—then John Major's reams of Charterspeak will not have been in vain.

I'm off to the Edinburgh Festival, where I shall be observing audience etiquette with a keen eye. In London, theatreland is turning into an extension of the rat race. Your expensive ticket entitles you to be elbowed in the foyer, pushed in the aisles and trampled at the bar, as if the rush hour had simply adjourned from the streets to the stalls. Instead of treating the theatre as a leisure activity, a time for relaxation, people carry their aggression from office to auditorium. Gone, for example, is the convention which said that the incumbents of a row should stand up, faintly smiling, to let latecomers squeeze past. Nowadays, polite attempts at apology are likely to be met with snarling irritation, delivered from a defiantly sedentary position.

Edinburgh, a city famous for the correctness of its manners, is not immune from this decline. It pains me to say so. My own great-grandfather, a scrupulous inhabitant of Morningside, tipped his hat to everyone and never went out without his spats. But times have changed. Last year, during the interval of a play at St Bride's centre, a man charged after me through the entrance to the ladies' lavatory.

This was too much. Was the final taboo to be breached? I rounded on him in speechless outrage. "Oh," he said, brazenly leaning on the door. "You don't mind if I wait for my wife. Do you?"

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Bottomley's criminal negligence

Julian Critchley, the Conservative Party's licensed jester, once said of the present Secretary of State for Health that she is not the sort of Tory lady who would brandish a pair of handcuffs from the rostrum of a Conservative Party conference. This was meant to be a compliment, since there are undoubtedly lots of grim Tory ladies who would gladly do exactly that to emphasise a point in the hanging and flogging debate. Saying that Virginia Bottomley was not that sort of Tory was meant to suggest that she was a paid-up member of the human race, and broadly sane.

Mr Critchley may well have been right in this assertion back in the days when Mrs Bottomley was a mere backbencher, and therefore confined to speaking from the conference rostrum. But this week there are good grounds for fearing that she could indeed produce a pair of handcuffs at this year's conference—and, what's more, on the platform. All of a sudden, handcuffs seem quite an appropriate symbol of her regime at the Department of Health, and of her approach to the care of young people. Her announcement that she intends to privatise the provision of so-called "secure accommodation" for uncontrollable teenagers raises severe doubts about her continuing membership of the human race, and perhaps even her sanity.

Almost nothing in the present government's behaviour is more offensive to normal human attitudes to crime and punishment than the idea that it is proper for the state to farm out the running of prisons, the escorting of prisoners, and now the locking up of young people, to privately owned agencies. I believe that almost any normal person instinctively finds the very idea of making a profit out of depriving fellow citizens of their liberty completely unacceptable. That ministers in Mr Major's cabinet are apparently unable to see how repellent it is merely serves to underline the depth of the damage done by 14 years of Thatcherism, and the extent to which ordinary human feelings have been dulled by the elevation of private gain into the main motivating force of our society.

No doubt Mr Major, and ministers like Michael Howard, Michael Portillo, and Mrs Bottomley would reply that it is myself and others like me, on the bleeding-heart wing of society, who suffer from a blind spot in thinking about such matters. They would probably argue that there is nothing sacrosanct about the status of the Prison Officers' Association and its members, or anything written in blood that declares that only Home Office employees know how to run a jail. Indeed, they might even use the notorious squalor of many of Her Majesty's prisons as supporting evidence for the benefits of privatisation.

And it may well be true that some privatised prisons are better, more hygienic and more humane than many of those grim fortresses that belong to the state system. Indeed, it would be surprising if they were not, since most of them are virtually brand new. But to think in these terms is to miss the point of the basic objection to privatisation. I take this to be that locking people up is, in essence, a matter of violence, either actual or threatened. Prisoners are kept behind prison walls ultimately by the knowledge that those charged with seeing they stay there are authorised to use violence to ensure that they do. And, in my view (and I think in the view of most normal people), the authorisation of violence against fellow citizens can only be justified if it is carried out by officers of the state acting on behalf of society as a whole.

If Bottomley's approach were taken to its logical conclusion, privatising the army would become feasible

To farm out the right to use violence to private companies, which have been formed specifically to make a profit for their shareholders out of this unpleasant field of human activity, flatly contradicts the widespread perception that only the direct representatives of the state have any right to employ force on our behalf. If it were not so, there would be no case at all against vigilantes beating up suspected criminals on the streets, or against bodies like the Unionist paramilitaries in Ulster conducting their own private war with the IRA.

Indeed, if the approach of Mr Howard and Mrs Bottomley were to be taken to its logical conclusion, there would be nothing wrong in ministers privatising the activity that many old-fashioned Tories regard as the central duty of any government—namely, the protection of the realm against the threat of outside attack. All those jokes about "rent-a-Jock" in connection with the disbandment of ancient regiments like the Gordon Highlanders would suddenly cease to be funny. Privatising the army—and perhaps even more suitably, the Royal Navy—would become not just feasible but even desirable in terms of the great god, value for money.

Indeed, using privatised violence on mere foreigners somehow seems less offensive than using it against our fellow citizens. Queen Elizabeth I found it quite acceptable to farm out that sort of thing to licensed privateers, just as 18th-century governments were happy to allow private individuals to collect the royal revenue for them, in return for a cut of the takings. For all I know, wheezes of this very kind are even now being examined by some obscure cabinet committee, and will be the subject of some lunatic ministerial statement in the dying stages of the present ministerial madhouse.

But, in the meantime, it is surely the right moment for people like the bishops to speak out against the basic wrongness of using private profit as the driving mechanism of our prisons, let alone as the motive for locking up our more intractable teenagers. Nor is it quite good enough for Labour spokespersons to denounce Mrs Bottomley's crazy scheme simply on the grounds that it threatens to create so-called colleges of crime. What is needed is a deafening chorus of moral protest against the very idea that private individuals can be invited to bid for the bodies of men, women and children who are locked up for the good of the state.

It does not matter one way or the other that Group 4 made such a preposterous hash of taking over the job of escorting prisoners to court and back again. It would have been just as wrong on moral grounds, even if its employees had proved ten times more efficient than the old-fashioned screws they replaced. The only point of the fuss that surrounded the affair was that it even knocked the bottom out of the sleazy case the government had made for its scheme—namely, that using private guards would work out both cheaper and better than employing the government's prison officers.

Indeed, Home Secretary Howard had every reason to be grateful about one aspect of the fiasco. However incompetent Group 4 turned out to be, at least none of the prisoners they were escorting have been killed by the methods used to restrain them. He must have thanked his lucky stars that it wasn't Group 4 that was responsible for the death of Mrs Gardner in Wood Green earlier this month.

Meanwhile, I have one suggestion for Mrs Bottomley: in future, she should share her thoughts more fully with her husband, the Hon member for Eltham. Peter Bottomley has a reputation for being just a mite loopy, and lacking in the steely common sense that is alleged to characterise his more successful wife. But I very much doubt if he would have let her do anything so daft as her latest venture, had she told him about it beforehand.

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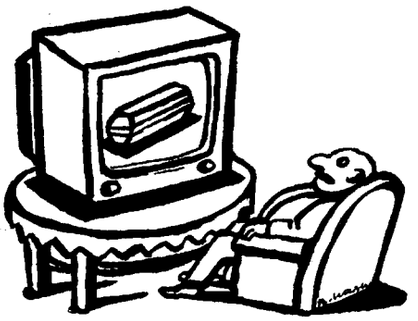

Carve-up of Bosnia begins

An August torpor overhangs the talks in Geneva on the future of Bosnia-Hercegovina. The international mediators, Lord Owen and Thorwald Stoltenberg, having frog-marched Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic to the very brink of surrender, appear to be standing back a little, trying vainly to pretend that the imminent partition of Bosnia-Hercegovina into a union of national republics is somehow the logical outcome of this catastrophe.

Izetbegovic himself has had good reason to keep stalling the talks. His options are almost equally bad. By agreeing to partition, he abandons the goal for which he and his forces have been fighting: a unified state of equal citizens. Many scores of thousands will then have died for absolutely nothing, or less than nothing, as far as the next generation's future goes. If he fights on, people will keep dying for nothing; for the inhabitants of Sarajevo are desperate for peace, and cannot sustain another winter under seige. It is said, too, that some of Izetbegovic's own soldiers threatened to kill him if he yielded at Geneva to the Serb demand for Sarajevo to be divided.

His approach to Croatian President Franjo Tudjman on 4 August, suggesting a territorial union of Bosnian Muslims and Croats, was a last bid to prevent the official dismemberment of Bosnia-Hercegovia. Of course, it was coldly rebuffed. Izetbegovic also said that he wouldn't negotiate while the Serbs were on Mounts Igman and Bjelasnica; so, with obscene promptness, Nato was allowed at last to brandish the big stick at General Mladic's men, who duly withdrew.

Now Izetbegovic maintains the future "Bosnian Republic" should have 40 per cent of Bosnia-Hercegovina, not the 30 per cent on offer from the Bosnian Serbs and Croats. He insists, too, that surviving enclaves of resistance such as Breko, Goradze and Srebrenica must belong to the Bosnian Republic, along with Muslim-majority land overrun by Serb forces during the war.

The latter objective is certainly impossible. As for Breko and so on, why should Mladic, Radovan Karadzic and the other Bosnian Serb leaders permit these besieged towns to become thorns in the flank of their "Serb Republic"? They claim, falsely, that eastern Bosnia had a Serb majority. Most likely these towns will remain, pending further negotiations, as nominal UN-protected "safe havens"; the populations will drain away, having no choice; then the towns will be merely absorbed into the Serb Republic, meaning, into Greater Serbia.

A question mark hangs, too, over the most secure enclave of Mulsim control: Cazinska Krajina, in the north west. This area cannot adjoin other Muslim areas, in central Bosnia, let alone the eastern outposts. Back in June, Tikret Abdic, the boss of Cazinska Krajina, made a bid to outflank Izetbegovic at the negotiations. Supported by Tudjman and Lord Owen, he tightened the pressure on Izetbegovic to capitulate. Abdic's own enclave is not viable alone, however, and Abdic is too astute not to know it. Can he steer a course among Croatia to the north, the Bosnian Serbs to the south, and the Croatian Serbs to the west?

This is only one question that the Geneva formula, far from resolving, raises to a new pitch of urgency. The final treaty will presumably provide corridors, for example, to link parts of each republic; yet such corridors will be a constant affront to the forces that carved out national territories in Bosnia-Hercegovina; and there is no likelihood that the western powers will be ready to commit enough troops for enough time to make the corridors really secure.

The same will surely hold for Sarajevo, which has been spared division at the price of disarmament.

The Geneva formula for a union of republics will settle nothing because its true function is to absolve, not to resolve. The western powers are incapable of deciding to oppose naked aggression, partly because they cannot grasp that the integrity of Bosnia-Hercegovina is a precondition of stability throughout the region. So they appease, hoping—if they think even this far ahead—to dodge the standard effect of appeasement, which logically accelerates the events that it tries to forestall.

Western policy has always fortified the extremists in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina while undermining everyone else. The effects are plain to see. In Croatia, the right wing of the ruling party waxes madly confident, and Tudjman recently hailed the dawn of a new era—"a historic era in which multinational states feature no more on the international scene". Is anyone listening in Whitehall and Washington?

Mark Thompson

25 YEARS AGO

"Back to square one"
23 August 1968

The New Statesman comments on the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia

For the third time in 30 years, Czechoslovakia is paying the price of being too good for its neighbours. A small, peaceful, politically sophisticated nation, placed between two countries which can hardly lay claim to any such epithets, has made the same error as those born poor, or gentle, or unselfish; and will be punished for it. Benes's succesful social democracy was an intolerable insult to Stalin and to Hitler, Bubcek's liberalised communism was apparently equally insulting to Brezhnev and to Ulbricht. Socialists in the west—and the more intelligent Western Marxists—have argued for 12 years that Eastern Europe could undergo peaceful change. It is now apparent that they were wrong. We are now back to square one: not only to 1956, but to 1948, to the original ice age of the cold war. Russian policy in eastern Europe is now evidently based on monolithic resistance to change.
It is no longer worth making excuses for Soviet communism, or for parties that acknowledge the Soviet Union as an authority, a leader or a goal. Worse, it is no longer worth hoping that any humanised Marxism can come out of Eastern Europe. Earlier this year, it seemed briefly as if, somewhere between Paris and Prague, some relief might be found for the European left's emotional aridity and intellectual impasse. Both columns of that arch have now fallen; it will take a long time to rebuild.

The price of free trade

Three years ago, the full meaning of free trade hit Watsonville, a farm town in the Pajaro valley, 90 miles down the coast from San Francisco.

Watsonville, historically, has been a major provider of vegetables for the frozen food industry, and these days many North American cities are getting their produce fresh, from Chile and other distant "export platforms". So Watsonville had already lost 4,000 out of 6,000 jobs when Grand Metropolitan gave 370 Green Giant vegetable packers the pink slip. Their jobs were relocated to Grand Met's plant in Irapuato, some 150 miles north- west of Mexico City.

From the corporate point of view, the Irapuato move seemed sound enough. Green Giant's Mexican workers in Watsonville were getting $7.61 an hour. Green Giant's Mexican workers in Irapuato get $3.76 a day. The frozen food gets bulk-shipped up to a plant in Ohio, repacked there and distributed to eastern markets.

The Watsonville workers were unionised, in Teamster Local 912. Green Giant's Irapuato plant has, as they say in Mexico, a "white" or company union. The plant in Ohio has no union at all.

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NEWS FROM ELSEWHERE

But vegetable processors shifting to Irapuato have found that life doesn't always fit the business blueprint. True, labour is cheap, but the truckers hauling the green stuff north to the Texas border either have to use costly toll roads or make time-consuming detours along Mexican back roads, through tiny villages where peasants ask why the truck has mashed the chickens and side-swiped the cow.

And there are a lot of saints' days on the Mexican calendar. The culture moves at a different pace, very frustrating to the time-and-motion folk hunched over their spreadsheets in London, where Grand Met has its headquarters. So the haemorrhaging from Watsonville has stopped.

The Watsonville Green Giant workers organised a boycott of all businesses owned by Grand Met, which include Burger King, Alpo dog food, J&B Scotch, Haagen Daz ice cream and kindred staples of life. One of the boycott organisers, Yolanda Navarro, went to Mexico and visited the local offices of the Frente Autentico de los Trabajadores (FAT), the militant labour confederation. Later, Local 912 provided help for a FAT organising drive in the Green Giant plant in Irapuato.

"As a result of our efforts," says the president of Local 912, Joe Fahey, "Grand Met hiked its advertising budget to combat the publicity surrounding the boycott. They promised to create a water-purifying plant in Irapuato, and they spent $2 million on a severance package for the Watsonville workers, with a super-duper retraining programme."

Fahey also points out that the trouble with retraining is the familiar one: no jobs in Watsonville, and, since the average educational level of the displaced workers is between second and fourth grade in Mexico, it's going to take a lot of education to make them into biophysicists.

But those Green Giant workers have managed one big thing. They have made the flight of jobs south from their plant symbolic of what the North American Free Trade Agreement means. Yolanda Navarro made the 12 July cover of *Fortune*. It's a parable about international solidarity, about which Fahey and Navarro are unromantically realistic. Those early trips to Mexico three years ago were greeted with suspicion and even outright hostility by workers in Irapuato, who thought a six-dollar-a-day job was certainly a lot better than no job at all.

For the corporations, "free trade" means security of investment in Mexico and a stable pool of cheap labour. For labour, free trade means an unending, savagely difficult organising effort to raise international working standards and rates, to pre-empt the whipsaw bids of capital to find the cheapest hourly rate. As Fahey says, the Watsonville workers have to persuade their opposite numbers in Irapuato that there is, along with self-interest, a common interest—and that, whereas the corporate drafter of NAFTA want to see the hemispheric wage drop from the $7.61 an hour to the $3.76 a day, workers want the momentum to be in the other direction.

Alexander Cockburn

LETTER FROM MOSCOW

For students of the city in transition, Moscow has much to offer. There is now a Cadillac salesroom opposite the Museum of the Revolution on Treverskaya Street, formerly Gorky Street. A second McDonald's has opened.

Hundreds of Iraqi refugees gather each day outside the *Izvestia* offices on Pushkin Square. Benetton has an outlet in the huge department store GUM. A proliferation of political views is evident in the press, including rabid, and sometimes anti-semitic, nationalism. Beggars and hawkers clog the metro stations. The favourite drink of the young seems to be Bailey's Irish Cream. On the Arbat pedestrian precinct, the flea market of post-communism is evident: KGB notebooks, bright red political banners with Leninist slogans, Red Army caps, vodka hip flasks. Some street names have changed, but Kropotkina metro station remains the same—"he was not a Marxist," a friend explains. Statues of Lenin still stand, but those of many others—Dzerzhinsky, Stalin, Kirov—have been pulled down, and deposited in an eerie corner of the park around Dom Khudonshnikov, the House of Artists.

In the Museum of the Revolution, the old exhibits, including a statue of a man with a rifle in one hand and a child in the other, are still there. "It is all so boring," a young woman remarks. But new items have been added: pictures on infant mortality and orphans in the USSR, and a graphic exhibit of posters, pictures, slogans, complete with messages of international solidarity from August 1991. In the driveway are the remains of an orange tram, used for the pro-Yeltsin barricades.

One observer says that 70 to 80 per cent of the old elite are still there, even if not controlled by a party-state apparatus

Crime has risen spectacularly, though with local variations. Whereas in New York, it is the passengers who attack the drivers, in Moscow it tends to be the other way round. Yet so much is the same: the smell of semi-peripheral benzine in the air, the number of children and teenagers at the opera, the *dezhurnayas* patrolling their hotel floors, the special Russian wordiness that was, wrongly, associated with communist rule. The red flag may have come down, but the two red stars still top the Kremlin towers.

Beyond these surface appearances is the broader question of who is running the country and how far old elites have been replaced. One observer says that 70 to 80 per cent of the old elite are still there, even if not controlled by a party-state apparatus as before. A friend who once worked in the international department of the Central Committee assures me that the CPSU is still there. He shows me his party card, with dues paid up to date, and claims that many CPSU members are active in other parties. "We have learnt from western Trotskyists," he jokes. "We are practising entryism. If all our members regrouped, the other parties would collapse."

The most striking sign of continuity with the communist, and pre-communist, past is the way literary references crop up in conversation. A friend tells me to stop trying to find a rational explanation for the parliamentary wrangles, and read Dosteovsky's *The Possessed*. Walking through a beautiful square, with a small lake in the middle, my colleagues remark that this the Pond of the Patriarchs, scene of the opening pages of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*. After hitting a pothole, the driver expostulated by quoting Gogol's saying that the two things wrong with Russia are *duraki i dorogi*—"the fools and the roads".

Strange things are happening to the Russian language. A mass of expressions associated with communist rule have disappeared, to be replaced by the terminology of a new, as yet imprecise, era: *privatisatsia* (remember that the word privatisation was unknown in the west a decade and a half ago), *vucherisatsia* (the providing of vouchers to all citizens for the purchase of state enterprises), and *bizniz* (the new fad).

Among the many features of communist policy now being abandoned is the commitment to equality of men and women and support for women's participation in employment. The term "feminist" is almost universally abhorred. "It is a synonym for aggressive," one otherwise urbane political scientist told me. The new family law, now under discussion in parliament, calls for a return of women to the home. The small ads of papers tell of the pressures on women: some offer themselves as a healthy body willing to bear infertile couples a child; in another, a couple offers to have a third child and give it away, in return for a larger flat.

Beneath the appearance of an end to the cold war and closer integration with the west, other forces are stirring. Many resent the support for western sanctions against Serbia, Iraq and Libya. Rumours about foreign influence abound: that foreign firms are looting the country, that Russian orphans taken abroad for adoption are being killed, and their organs sold off for transplant. Feeling is remarkably high against the country regarded as the oldest enemy of all—Turkey, with whom Russia fought wars from the time of Peter the Great through the first world war. If people seem unexpectedly relaxed about the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it is, in part, because they believe that this is but a passing phase and that, sooner or later, many of the now independent republics will return to a union with Russia.

Fred Halliday

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English Heritage

The epic struggles of the English revolution live on. **Kirsty Milne** goes on campaign with the stalwarts of the English Civil War Society, and finds that everyone wins

Fighting a very civil Civil War

The royalist pike march over the hill like a moving forest. Behind them gallop the cavalry, regimental colours streaming in the wind. The parliamentarian forces turn and brace themselves. Musketeers prime their guns to fire; horsemen draw their swords. In the smoky melee, shouts can be heard, and thundering hooves, and the sound of metal on metal. A deadly fray. Yet strangely, no soldier falls. They fight on, undaunted and unscathed . . .

It is a Bank Holiday battle. Behind a cordon, safe from stray pike, are the massed ranks of cagoule-clad spectators, armed with cameras and picnic plates. Small boys sit rapt, while their parents pop up and down like jack-in-the-boxes, taking pictures. From time to time, the odd 17th-century throwback can be seen drifting through the crowd: a man in breeches, a woman in cap and gown.

For this is the English Civil War Society, still fighting 350 years after the event. Its members, in authentic calico undergarments, are sweating it out in front of Battle Abbey, near Hastings in Sussex. True, no battle took place at Battle in 1643. There was a famous one in 1066 . . . but it does not do to be pedantic. Real civil war sites aren't always available. Then there is the question of space. You need a field that can accommodate 1,000 soldiers from the 17th century and 6,000 visitors from the 20th.

The site is owned, and the battle orchestrated, by English Heritage, which runs 100 historical events a year, attracting a quarter of a million visitors. "We are the brand leader," says Howard Giles, head of the events unit, "and we work with the *crème de la crème* of the re-enactment groups." A big battle like this takes months to plan. Scripts are written, tactics discussed, scenarios adopted and discarded. "I like to think of myself," says Giles, "as the Cecil B DeMille of historical renactment." The son of a military historian, he is a man of rigorous standards. "My pet hate is civil war soldiers wearing modern glasses. I like them to wear contact lenses, or the little round glasses of the period."

Authenticity is the watchword of the English Civil War Society. Authenticity was the issue over which, in the early 1970s, its founders broke away from the more famous Sealed Knot. Costumes and weapons are researched and made by members themselves. "It's something of a cottage industry," says the society's secretary Chris Johnson, white collar flapping over his grey civilian worsted. "People can make you anything from a pike to a pair of 17th-century leather shoes." (He personally keeps a stock of 18-foot ash pikes in his garage.) Novices get help in kitting themselves out; otherwise, a would-be musketeer could be shelling out as much as £500, once modern firearms licences are included.

Ross Davies, from south London, is dubious about the new coat issued by his regiment, describing it as "lark's vomit yellow". His consolation is a fur-trimmed hat, inspired by the continental styles of the thirty years' war.

In the lull before the battle, Davies is munching bread and pickle at a trestle table, a pewter mug of cider at his elbow. He has been a member of the English Civil War Society for 17 years, since the day he met a couple of musketeers in the pub. "I started out as a Royalist," he explains. "Knowing nothing, I fancied a feather in my hat. But then I began hungering for democracy. It's the same as in the 17th century: they're an autocracy, we're a democracy."

He gestures towards the Royalist encampment, their tents just visible over the brow of the hill. "It's another social scene, those people down there. Red wine-drinkers as opposed to cider-drinkers. You have to find the social scene that suits you."

The society's 3,000 members are split between the King's Army and the Roundhead Association, with the edge on the parliamentary side. Regionally, members follow the old civil war allegiances. Those in the north and west tend towards the king, while Londoners and East Anglians plump for parliament.

Women, who make up 30 per cent of the society, are welcome to slug it out on the battlefield. ("You can't see from a distance, and hair was longer then," explains Howard Giles.) Alternatively, they can join the civilian contingent, who come to the fore in "living history" displays, when members recreate a 17th-century village, or take over a stately home. Elizabeth Smith, a Norfolk gardener and former florist, leads her civil war life as a merchant. "I've always been a royalist through and through, in the 20th century too. The Roundheads"—she points at soldiers drilling obediently in the field below—"can't have as much fun, especially the puritans."

The society blends students with headmasters, housewives with naval commanders.

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Class society: members range from elite cavalry (right) to pikemen (below)

Chris Johnson, himself a teacher from north Tyneside, feels that adopting a new identity is socially liberating. "When you see someone in costume, it's impossible to tell who or what they are in 20th-century terms. You might get an oil executive taking orders from someone who's been six months unemployed." He hastens to pre-empt the charge that re-enactors are "playing soldiers" (see Debbie Aldridge's early prejudice against the Sealed Knot in *The Archers*). "Some people say we're about the glorification of war. Actually, the re-enactments bring home to members, and I hope to the public as well, how scary and how futile the war was."

By the spring of 1643, the conflict had reached stalemate. Despite gaining ground at Edgehill the previous year, the King had failed to take London and was encamped at Oxford. On the parliamentary side, Oliver Cromwell had not yet created his New Model Army. "It was even stevens," explains Howard Giles. "It was anybody's guess which way the war would go."

So there is nothing inevitable about the outcome of our Sussex skirmish. It starts with the Royalists, under Sir Ralph Hopton, trying to lure the enemy away from their baggage train. The pikemen advance on each other, bristling like two sets of toothpicks. The cavalry chase their fellows, meeting sword to sword. An energetic commentator is running around trying to guide his audience through the hullabaloo. Sighting Sir William Waller, the parliamentary commander, he rushes over, brandishing a microphone, crying, "Sir! Sir! Can you spare me a minute of your valuable time?" Waller says something noncommittal about the Lord being on their side. Everyone is very polite.

Meanwhile the pike have clashed. Like a handful of pick-a-sticks dropped at random, the steel tips slant spikily in different directions. The pikemen are unable to move much; they shout a lot instead. This manoeuvre was known as "the push of pike". It looks very much like a rugby scrum, or an immobilised, protesting hedgehog.

After half an hour, the audience is restless. The commentator is coasting. "What is happening? Who is winning?" he asks, more in confusion than rhetoric. Soldiers are fighting in little knots and huddles. A military strategist would be hard put to find the front line. You begin to understand what the stage direction "Alarums and excursions" really means.

You also realise that something is fundamentally wrong with this battle. Nobody is dying. Nobody is throwing up their arms in that satisfactory way and going "Aaaargh!" Everyone is staying on their feet. With such embroilment, there should be carnage. But the field is conspicuous for its lack of corpses. People you saw being whacked ten minutes ago are up and about again, like the casualties in *Tom and Jerry*.

Stephen Wisdom, a "fireworker" from the pyrotechnics team, explains that it would not be safe to have people lying on the ground when there are horses—and gunpowder—about. He is not satisfied with the explosion in the parliamentary camp. "It wasn't as big as it should have been. We ruptured our firing

tube." For him, the battle has been "a bit of a disappointment" altogether. Being a Leveller, with a democratic slogan on his home-made sword, he was hoping for a good ideological set-to. But he failed to find a Catholic priest to dispute with on the battlefield.

Wisdom is bored with battles, preferring small-scale domestic re-enactments, "where you can behave in character and interact more with the public". But being a gentle and sensitive sort, he adds that his seven years with the society "have made me the man I am. I used to be bashful and now I'm bold, I run my own business. It's just that I don't spend every waking moment thinking about it any more."

The battle is over: inconclusively, judging by the number of people wandering round asking, "Who won?" (In fact the Roundheads won on Sunday and the Royalists on Monday: "We're very fair," explains Chris Johnson.) Thirsty footsoldiers troop to the beer tent. But the Royalist cavalry withdraw for a private post-mortem. Sir Richard Grenvile's Regiment of Horse, an intimidating group in magnificent bucket-top boots, are jeering at an enemy officer who fell off his horse. They have harsh words, too, for the St John's Ambulance team, who sent an intrusive ambulance on to the battlefield. (They were not to know that a soldier was taken to hospital, injured by an exploding cartridge.)

The cavalry see themselves as the elite. Their equipment alone sets them apart. Robin Horne, a friendly export sales manager, shows off his awesomely heavy "buffcoat", made of protective leather. It cost him £400. Most of his companions, men and women alike, sport the long flowing locks associated with Cavalier portraits. They also display a few Conservative prejudices. One observes, without humour, "No lefties here!" But the regiment are modest about their riding skills, claiming the only qualifications are "to be able to ride with one hand, wave a sword with the other, and be confident of staying on". They also offer a convincing explanation for the low death count. "If you have driven 400 miles to get here," says a woman briskly, "you're hardly going to want to be mown down in the first ten minutes, are you?"

Despite the dearth of bodies, and the absence of blood on the field, the English Civil War Society recruited 450 new members that weekend. English Heritage took £25,000, a source of great satisfaction to Howard Giles. He likes re-enactments and re-enactors; he has their interests at heart. And so he should. When time permits, he is himself a drummer in a Parliamentary regiment.

The English Civil War Society can be contacted at 70 Hailgate, Howden, North Humberside DN14 7ST. Tel: (0430) 430695

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Silence of the lambs

Last week, while the government and media performed stunts with the children of Bosnia, an anniversary passed virtually unnoticed. It was 24 years since Britain sent troops to Northern Ireland. The war that is never called a war began then in earnest.

The war's catalyst was the enforced poverty of the Catholic minority, yet sectarianism became the self-fulfilling war cry. People were encouraged to fight the wrong fight by British politicians who saw Northern Ireland as a "security problem" with religious overtones, rather than a problem of colonialism, poverty and discrimination with religious distractions. In 24 years, the British establishment has not put forward a single plan offering a durable peace and reconciliation; and the troops are still there.

The public, of course, wants the troops out; but their perception of Northern Ireland has been otherwise finely dulled. Outrages and funerals pass by on the TV screen without context and explanation, merely specious indignation from Westminster. The few broadcasters who refuse to accept the plethora of censoring laws and "prior restraint" have to be brave indeed; the researcher Ben Hamilton, who helped to make Channel 4's *The Committee*, about a state conspiracy of violence in Northern Ireland, almost went to prison after the government used its weapon of smear, the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Generally speaking, this is not necessary. The management of censorship in Britain is much too sophisticated, the collaboration guaranteed. "I made it clear," said Lord Reith, founder of the BBC and inventor of sham impartiality, "that we must be told ahead of things that might cause trouble". Mostly in that spirit, no less than 98 British television programmes on Ireland, on the BBC, ITV and Channel 4, have been banned, doctored and delayed. Radio has been similarly silenced, but television is most people's primary source of information.

The complete list of banned programmes would fill every page of this journal; it does not include routine censorship in the television news. Here, in this anniversary week, is a selection taken just from the past ten years (and with thanks to Liz Curtis).

1983 Channel 4 *Green Flutes*, a documentary about a republican flute band from Glasgow, was delayed three times, and cuts made to its sequence on Northern Ireland.
1984 BBC *Open Space* on the media coverage of Ireland was dropped.
1985 BBC *Panorama*, critical of "policing" in Northern Ireland, was dropped on "legal advice". The programme was one of the first to deal with claims that the Royal Ulster Constabulary ran a "shoot to kill" policy.
1985 BBC *Real Lives*, a documentary about the lives of two Derry politicians, was banned after the then Home Secretary, Leon Brittan, wrote to the BBC, saying the film was "contrary to the national interest" and "likely to give succour to terrorist organisations". He hadn't seen it. In a rare move, BBC journalists went on strike, and BBC management finally relented, after demanding cuts.
1985 BBC *Open to Question*, a discussion programme broadcast in Scotland, was dropped after Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams accepted an invitation to appear.
1985 UTV *Witness*, a religious programme, was dropped after David Bleakley, general secretary of the Irish Council of Churches, warned of endemic fear in Northern Ireland, and said that what was needed was "a politics of doing things together".
1985 BBC *Songs of Praise* was scrapped after certain Protestants refused to cooperate in the wake of the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.
1986 BBC *Question Time* from Belfast was dropped when Unionist MPs refused to take part.
1986 Channel 4 *Eleventh Hour* was forced by the Independent Broadcasting Authority to drop a film about the use of plastic bullets in Ireland. Entitled *They Shoot to Kill Children*, the film included an interview with a boy who was hit in the face with a plastic bullet when he was 12 years old.
1987 Channel 4 *Court Report* was banned after the Attorney-General was granted an injunction by the Court of Appeal. The subject was the Birmingham Six. The Court of Appeal, which included the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Lane, was the same court concurrently hearing the appeal of the Birmingham Six. The Court refused to lift the injunction until after it had rejected the appeal.
1988 Channel 4 *Network 7*, a magazine programme, was prevented from broadcasting live a discussion entitled "Should the troops remain in Ireland?" The IBA demanded that a phone-in poll be dropped, as it was "open to abuse by unrepresentative opinion".
1988 Channel 4 *After Dark*, a late-night discussion programme, was dropped after protests against the planned appearance of Gerry Adams.
1988 BBC *Panorama* delayed and cut a programme on the SAS after Director General John Checkland and his deputy, John Birt, intervened. The programme was finally shown after part of an SAS training video, showing an exercise with live bullets in the SAS's "killing house", was removed.
1989 Channel 4 *The Silent Scream*, a documentary about the use of plastic bullets in Northern Ireland, was dropped. The official reason given was its "lack of structure". Programme makers were told: "We have to keep our heads low; Ireland is a sensitive issue."
1989 BBC *Forever Divided*, a programme to mark the 20th anniversary of the arrival of British troops in Ireland, included an interview with Gerry Adams in subtitles only. Under the "Sinn Féin ban", decreed by the then Home Secretary Douglas Hurd, the voices of certain Irish MPs could not be broadcast. Although the Broadcast Ban is almost certainly itself illegal under European conventions, it has never been challenged in court by the broadcasting institutions.
1990 UTV *The Struggle for Democracy*, a documentary by Central TV, was banned by Ulster TV after four Ulster Defence Regiment soldiers were killed. A UTV executive said it would have been "insensitive" to broadcast it.
1990 UTV *Shoot to Kill*, a four-hour Yorkshire TV dramatisation of the RUC's killing of six unarmed men, was banned on "legal advice".
1991 BBC *Children of the North*, a four-part thriller set in the north of Ireland, was withdrawn because it was decided "it was inappropriate to air a programme whose theme was violence when British troops were fighting in the Gulf".
1991 Channel 4 In a three-week season entitled *Banned*, a film itself previously banned by Channel 4 was finally shown in a censored form. This was *Mother Ireland*, which examined the tensions between feminism and Irish republicanism. Footage of a woman immediately after she had been blinded by a rubber bullet were removed.

An interview with Mairead Farrell, who was one of three IRA members shot dead by the SAS in Gibraltar in 1988, was dubbed with the voice of an actress.
1992 BBC *Hands Across the Water*, a documentary tracing the links between Ireland and Bristol, was postponed twice, then finally transmitted with virtually no publicity.
1993 Channel 4 *Hidden Agenda*, Ken Loach's award-winning feature film about British undercover operations in Ireland, was dropped in the wake of the Warrington bombing. Loach said: "provided it didn't offend people's grief, there's no reason to ban it. We have got to discuss the issues openly. The horrific events in Warrington were awful beyond words, but people talk about it as though it bears no relation to British practices in Northern Ireland. Foremost among the men of violence are the British."

John Pilger's column will be absent for several weeks while he is abroad on assignment

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Michael Kitson and **Jonathan Michie** say that proponents of the ERM may have ignored the lessons of the 1930s

As bad as gold

"The gold standard, with its dependence on pure chance, its faith in "automatic adjustments", and its general regardlessness of social detail, is an essential emblem and idol of those who sit in the top tier of the machine. I think that they are immensely rash in their regardlessness, in their vague optimism and comfortable belief that nothing really serious ever happens."
(John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of Mr Churchill*, 1925)

From the mid-1920s, the world economy embraced the gold standard as a framework for exchange rate policy. The effect was to dampen growth in the late 1920s and exacerbate the Great Depression of 1929-32. As with the exchange rate mechanism (ERM), the experience of the gold standard illustrates the dangers of "co-operative" systems with fixed exchange rates. In both the interwar period and more recently, the exchange rate systems created deflationary biases in many countries, with those running balance-of-payments deficits forced to cut demand to reduce imports.

In textbook theory, prices adjust and the economy returns to its previous position with only a temporary loss of output and jobs. In practice, slow growth lowers the long-run capacity of the economy due to its impact on physical and human capital.

With the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, the US called in foreign loans. The draining of reserves in the debtor countries led to tighter monetary policy to ensure gold convertibility. Thus, the deflationary bias of the gold standard system resulted in a perverse reaction to adverse demand shocks. Rather than facilitating an expansion of demand to ameliorate the depression, the system magnified the problem leading to a collapse in world trade and output.

The route out of depression was also constrained by the exchange rate system. The structure, characteristics and paths of development of the major economies were different, and so the timing and the composition of the policy mix required was also different. Yet during this period economic policy was constrained by the gold standard, leaving little flexibility.

Like the ERM, the gold standard system was structurally flawed. First, discretion over the use of monetary, fiscal and exchange rate policy was removed so that adverse shocks could not be accommodated; on the contrary, the operation of the international monetary system magnified the impact of recessionary forces. The regime was particularly inappropriate for a recession phased differently among the international community.

Second, the system lumped together countries with different economic conditions and problems. These problems were not eradicated by the regime; rather they were accentuated.

And third, although cooperation would have limited the deflationary bias, it might have only extended the life of the system rather than prevent its ultimate demise: even if the stronger countries had been encouraged to reflate, this would not have completely eradicated the deflationary burden on constrained countries, a burden that may have had persistent effects on productive capacity. Indeed, had the system lasted longer, it might have resulted in divergent growth paths; reflation in the stronger countries could have led to faster growth of output and productivity, leading to a virtuous cycle of growth, with deflation limiting the growth potential of the relatively weaker countries.

Growth and improved economic performance during the 1930s was dependent on countries untying themselves from the strictures of the gold standard and adopting independent policies. Alternative, and more flexible, exchange rate regimes were established, and some countries also reaped the advantages of increased protectionism and fiscal expansion. The cooperative regime failed and uncoordinated policies were a vast improvement.

Growth during the 1930s was dependent on countries untying themselves from the gold standard

Today, mass unemployment and economic stagnation have been brought about by monetarist policies pursued by governments in the European Community, operating under the labels "Conservative" and "Socialist" alike. The operation of the ERM caused high interest rate policies, producing widespread unemployment throughout the 1980s in many of the participating economies.

When Britain joined the ERM in October, the stated objective was to squeeze inflation; what was not stated was the route by which it was hoped it would work, by deliberately making things hard for British firms, thereby forcing them to try to cut costs by cutting wages and introducing more intensive working practices. This is not the first time that governments have allowed the currency to be overvalued in this way. Winston Churchill, as chancellor, took Britain back on to the gold standard in the 1920s at an overvalued rate, with Keynes warning at the time, in his pamphlet, *The Economic Consequences of Mr Churchill*, of the disastrous likely consequences of this policy—which were to include the general strike of 1926. Similarly, the first Thatcher recession of 1979-1981 was exacerbated by the high exchange rate caused not only by North Sea oil, but also by the high interest rates resulting from the government's monetarist experiment.

In the interwar period, Britain was forced to abandon the gold standard. And the exchange rate similarly fell after 1981, depreciating nearly 30 per cent by 1986, which helped to fuel the recovery. Likewise, the overvalued rate at which Chancellor Major entered the ERM meant that our membership was always doomed to failure. Yet those who pointed this out at the time were dismissed out of hand. The leadership of all three major political parties supported continued membership at the overvalued rate. Even if this had been a genuine option, it would have been a disastrous one. In reality it was not even an option.

But the problems of the ERM lie deeper than just having joined at the wrong rate. The ERM was a high-unemployment mechanism, because all the pressure is (insofar as the ERM still operates) on the weak economies to take action, rather than on the strong ones. And worse, that action is designed more to prop up the currencies of the weak economies than to strengthen those economies' productive potential, which is the only sustainable basis for maintaining a healthy currency. High interest rates are fundamental to the system. These depress investment, weakening the economy. Yet it is most likely that the weakness of the economy underlay the weakness of the currency in the first place. So a weak economy produces a weak currency; the ERM then requires the government in question to raise interest rates; and increased interest rates squeezes the country's economy, leaving it still weaker. If this high interest rate policy proves inadequate, then government spending cuts are required, further accelerating the cumulative process of relative decline.

Alternative policies are required. First, the shelving of the Maastricht treaty—with its deflationary convergence criteria, unaccountable Central Bank and ill-thought out proposals for a single currency. Second, the collapse of the ERM system should be welcomed. It should be replaced with a managed exchange rate system that provides each country with some flexibility to deal with domestic economic problems, and does not place all the burdens of international adjustment on weaker countries. Keynes himself argued that the Bretton Woods system should have have put more onus on the surplus countries to reflate rather than deficit countries to deflate, but knowing that the United States—the main surplus country—would not agree, the British negotiating team did not even pursue Keynes's full proposals, provoking his response that, since the Americans would not listen to sense, the British proposed talking nonsense.

Michael Kitson is a fellow of St Catharine's College, Cambridge. Jonathan Michie is a fellow of Robinson College, Cambridge. Their pamphlet, "Coordinated Deflation: The Tale of Two Recessions", is available for £2 from the Full Employment Forum, 4 Armand Close, Watford, Herts WD1 3SQ

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In a few weeks Labour will publish a green paper on education. It couldn't come at a better time, says **Huw Richards**

Schools of thought

Nursery places for all would mean the biggest single boost to educational standards

This time the government really has run out of ideas. Firm evidence will be provided in the new parliamentary session when John Patten, if he survives as Secretary of State for Education, introduces legislation to end the so-called National Union of Students' "closed shop".

As a symptom of intellectual exhaustion, hounding the NUS is unmistakable. Sidestepped by all five previous Tory secretaries of state on the grounds that it was either too complicated, unnecessary or unimportant, it is now going ahead because there is nothing else at the bottom of the barrel.

But there is little reason for the left to feel too smug—it would come as a pleasant surprise to learn that the Labour Party has enough ideas on education to last seven years, let alone 14.

And, if it is out of ideas, the government has shown that it sometimes knows when it is beaten, with the watering-down of its plans for testing school pupils. So great was the scale of opposition, not even the government could believe that objections were politically inspired. Only the perception that his departure would be seen as a victory for the unions has kept John Patten in his job—he is, by any measure, far more to blame for the government's loss of credibility on education than Norman Lamont was for economic failure.

The high political profile for education over the last 18 months followed its non-role in the 1992 election. John Smith clearly had few complaints about his education team, since he gave Jack Straw, Derek Fatchett and Andrew Smith promotion and appointed Hilary Armstrong to a key role as his parliamentary private secretary. But the Liberal Democrat plan for an extra penny on income tax to fund the system remained the one opposition education proposal to make any impact.

A low-key approach has characterised the new Labour team under Anne Taylor. But even with the Secretary of State discredited and the government intellectually bankrupt, the opposition's job is only half-done. As Labour discovered last year, unless it can move on from that stage to make a positive assertion of its own ideas and priorities, failure is still more than likely.

So the release in the next few weeks of Labour's green paper on education is timely. Drawn up by the front-bench team over the past few months following extensive consultation and a series of seminars pulling in non-party as well as party expertise, the paper is intended as a discussion document—stimulating debate and laying out options rather than prescribing policy.

Just as the Conservative education reforms of the last 14 years have taken place within the context of a broader attack on the public-service ethic driven by a cost-accountant's view of the world, so will education changes from the left have to fit within a broader assertion of public-service values. The aggression of free-market propagandists has done immense damage to the left's self-confidence over the past 20 years. Labour has first to convince itself, then prove to the electorate, that public service is of value in itself; that accountability does not mean being run by accountants; that efficient is not just another word for cheap; and that equity and access are fundamental.

But this does not mean turning the clock back to 1979. Some of the reforms of the past 14 years have been thoroughly beneficial and should be retained. Nobody wants to go back to keeping inspectors' reports confidential. Local authorities will never again have the detailed control over school budgets or the automatic majorities on governing bodies that they had a decade ago. Few of us have the faith in the beneficence of state power that we had in 1979—one exception is Mr Patten, who acquired more than 50 new powers under the recently passed Education Act to add to the mound accumulated by his predecessors.

But certain measures will be essential to any non-Conservative government—and should hardly be a source of inter-party controversy, should the result of the next election compel some form of Lib-Lab agreement.

That the quality and commitment of teachers are central to any education system, however it is organised, is a self-evident truth that has somehow evaded the government. Restoring the morale and status of the profession at all levels, from nursery schools to universities, must be the priority. The undermining of the past 14 years has taken highly visible forms—the removal of negotiating rights from teachers' unions and the squeeze on university teachers' pay that made them the one employed professional group worse off in real terms over the 1980s.

It has also taken the more offensive form of a succession of secretaries of state denigrating teachers' professionalism, while relying on them to deliver the reforms imposed upon them. Ministers knew—as they loaded a succession of ill-conceived, often half-formed and invariably under-resourced policy initiatives on to the service—that teachers habitually cope. Some better than others, and at the cost of immeasurable overstretch and stress, but they keep the lid on and get on with the job. The near unanimity of the revolt against the recent test proposals was a protest not only at the tests themselves, but at a decade and more of this sort of overload.

The message that teachers are not to be trusted has been implicit in the minutely detailed prescription contained in the national curriculum and testing proposals. Some form of national curriculum and testing is likely to survive any change of government, but it must leave much greater scope for creativity to schools and teachers than at present.

The most recent attack comes in the form of the plan to put untrained teachers into primary schools. The government argues that teaching will benefit from an infusion of people with broader experience, and nobody could argue with that. The much maligned teacher education departments have been providing access courses for years on exactly that assumption. But this, like the almost forgotten registered teacher programme, is predicated on the assumption that the essential skills of teaching are so self-evident that anybody can do it—an assumption that anyone who has experienced the extremely bright, but totally untrained, teachers who proliferate in British universities will find it hard to accept. Any government serious about persuading adult entrants into the profession would eschew cheapjack schemes of this sort and look instead at extended childcare aided by tax breaks.

The creation of a general teachers' council and pay review body along the lines of those in the health service are obvious policy moves, but in return teachers' unions need to sort themselves out. If public-service unions can do it, there is no excuse for the teachers, whose proliferation of unions dissipates the limited industrial power they have. The growth of managerialism may have created the need for one separate heads' union—though hardly two—but there is no good reason for the continued separation of the three big rank-and-file unions.

Trusting teachers and schools should also be the hallmark of local authorities. Their role should be strategic and enabling, setting

Sally and Richard Greenhill

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broad policies and targets for schools and providing essential support services. One useful example that might be copied is Bradford's peripatetic bursar, a qualified accountant who handles the finances of several schools in the city, releasing overburdened headteachers from administrative minutiae.

As well as reclaiming opted-out schools and the failed City Technology programme, local authorities should also reclaim some responsibilities taken from them by government. Training and Enterprise Councils might have a useful advisory role on training and careers issues, but responsibility should be returned to democratically accountable bodies. Giving employers responsibility for training policy has the sole virtue of depriving British capitalism of another alibi for its dismal international performance, but is in essence a case of putting the problem in charge of the solution. Councils should also be restored as significant, though not controlling, partners in the running of further and higher education.

But LEAs should look for the greatest extension in their role at the other end of the age scale. Even Mrs Thatcher was right sometimes. If her pledge in the early 1970s to create nursery places for all three- to five-year olds had been implemented, there would now be fewer complaints about standards. And perhaps not only educational performance. US research findings are not automatically applicable to Britain, but it is worth noting the indication of the High Scope project that children who receive nursery education go on not only to do better in education but also to have lower rates of crime, teenage pregnancy, divorce and other social indicators.

But current nursery provision has to be funded from other budget areas and is extremely vulnerable to spending cuts. Statutory status and a change in council funding to encourage authorities to provide comprehensive under-five provision would have a greater medium-term impact on standards throughout the British education system than any other change.

Measuring those standards will remain a preoccupation—one of the marks left on the system by Thatcherism has been a mania for measuring, reflecting a belief that something that cannot be quantified in cost-accounting terms has no validity. Hence, the extraordinary proliferation of performance indicators—many ludicrously crude. The temptation to junk the lot is considerable, but the worthwhile motive underlying their growth is public accountability.

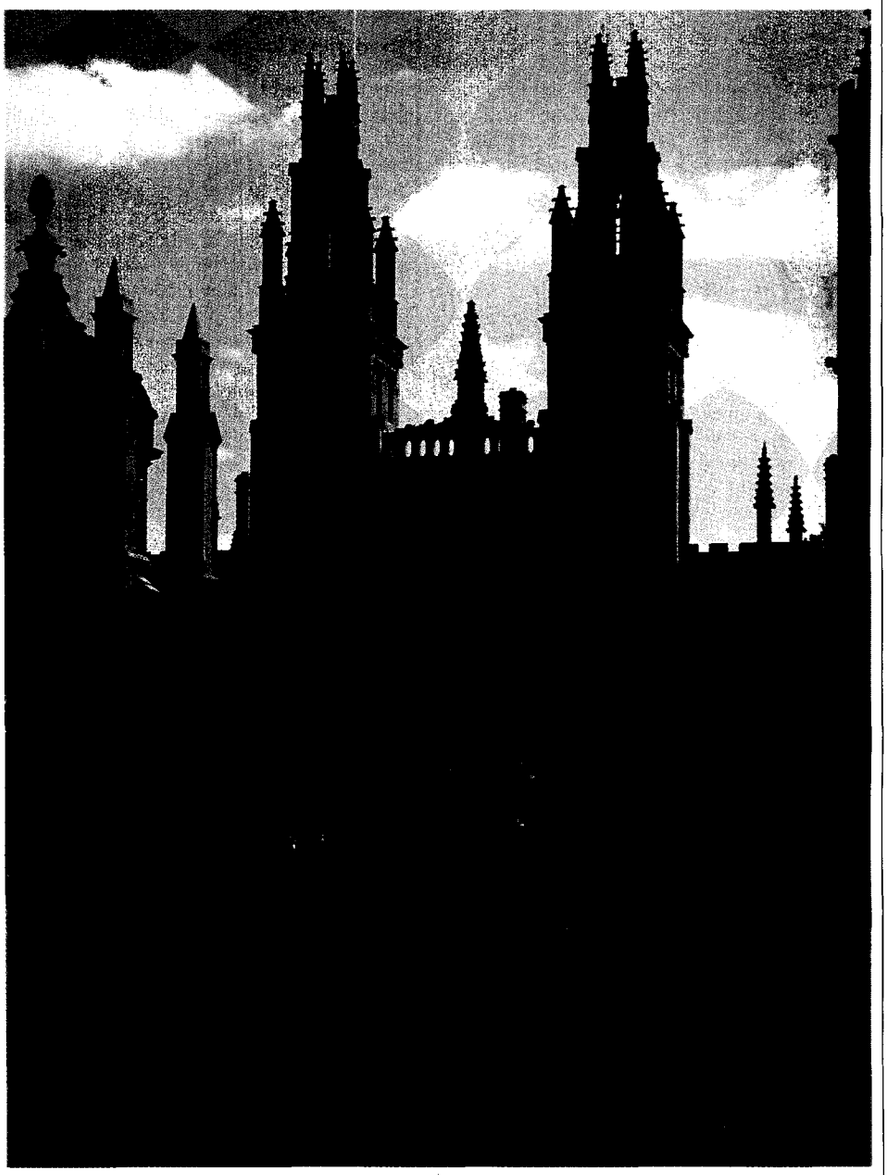
A constructive approach would be to encourage the development of sophisticated and meaningful indicators—moving on, for instance, from crude measurement of examination results to some sort of a "value-added" measure of an institution's performance. Much blood, sweat and tears will be expended over the next decade in attempting to define the elusive concept of quality—and higher education has got off to a horrendously botched start—but the effort will have to be made, unless the system is to be left in the hands of the accountants. The experience of the past 14 years should amply demonstrate why that is to be avoided at almost any cost.

Huw Richards is a reporter on the Times Higher Education Supplement

Syndication International

The government has thrown Britain's higher education system into turmoil. The relationship between teachers and students is suffering, says **Christopher Price**

From ivory tower to concrete jungle



If you were to ask the average vice chancellor to identify the crisis in British universities today, they would cite a shortage of cash and say that they do not get enough money for their staff to research and teach properly. This theme will occupy much of the vice chancellors' conference in Leicester next month. Top of the agenda will be a range of options to make students pay for their university education.

Such an exercise is an empty diversion. The government has no intention of condoning such an unpopular measure; and if money were raised in this way, a similar amount would be deducted by the Treasury from public funds. No one university now seems likely to break ranks and charge tuition fees on its own after the debacle at the London School of Economics, which was blocked from charging fees by opposition from within. Collective action is out, since universities no longer have either the will or the inclination to act together on anything. The vice chancellors' current obsession with doomed financial

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Daydreaming spires: Britain's universities are waking up to a harsher reality

stratagems hides a deeper malaise.

Their real crisis is one of identity. Universities no longer know their place in society. For centuries, Oxford and Cambridge doubled up as finishing schools for the well-to-do and upward mobility ladders for the talented poor. Their purpose was to restock the public and private bureaucracies of an imperial power with trained professionals and instill in them common cultural assumptions. Over the past century, all new universities, whether redbricks, white tiles or 1960s cathedral city creations have adopted this Oxbridge culture and justified doing so with rhetoric about the preservation of a literary and scientific "canon" and the need to enlarge knowledge through research. The student elite has been underpinned with a generous system of maintenance grants, while the universities have kept expansion at bay by controlling an A-level admissions filter.

The 1960s expansion took place within the old elite assumptions about the idea of a university. The Prime Minister's mass christening of 30 polytechnics as universities last year, and the rise in the admissions rate to nearly 30 per cent of young people, have probably already destroyed these assumptions. All our big cities now have two universities (with the ex-poly commonly far bigger than the old university) and some of our conurbations have four or five. Derby and Luton have achieved university academic status. It will be Northampton, Bolton and Inverness soon. The loss of local monopoly over the title has left many universitites perplexed and rudderless, while the new accountable funding system has faced them with agonising choices. Should they compete to join the research superleague or ape the polytechnics and teach more efficiently to a more practical curriculum? They face the same dilemmas that beset grammar schools when they went comprehensive 20 years ago.

Worse still, each university has to make these decisions on its own. The old producer cartel, operated for much of this century by the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals with the encouragement of the University Grants Committee, is collapsing under a whole range of new pressures: from students who want courses packaged to their own, rather than their lecturers' convenience; from professional and quality control bodies, determined to draw up league tables and expose fraudulent courses; from the Treasury, which has given notice that it will apply continuing pressure on budgets; from employers who are discounting academic graduate status and looking much more for a mixture of vocational skills and general capability; and even from international competitors who now purvey many English language courses at better value for money than we do. What was a quiet cloister, subject to a stern, almost religious, discipline, has become a nervous market place.

Not that everyone is complaining. Higher education, no longer seen as a threat to society, has dropped down the political agenda. Ministers do not interfere in the curriculum; there are far fewer politics on campus; many vice chancellors rather like the unaccustomed opportunity to exercise power; some academics, who have always been natural barrow boys, prefer hustling for cash to enlarging knowledge. Many students are on a high, family firsts in the game, and still amazed that they are at a university at all. But in the boiler room, the ship is creaking; lecturers are stressed, unclear what their jobs entail; teaching is being neglected for research; and some students are getting a raw deal.

There are a number of prerequisites for managing this change from elite to mass higher education. First, the government must stop opting out of the debate. The legal definition of higher education in recent acts of Parliament simply describes which courses are eligible for funding and gives no clue as to the object of the exercise. A vast policy vacuum yawns. The government-appointed funding councils in England, Wales and Scotland are meant simply to fund, not make policy; yet the vacuum the government has created by its aloofness is forcing these quangos to shape the system unsupervised.

Second, everyone, government, parents, schools and students, has to accept that there is no longer a university system as such. It is now plural and fragmented; the networks within it are now more significant than the system as a whole. The existing social set

Government, parents, schools and students: all must accept that a university system no longer exists

(Oxford, Cambridge, London, Bristol, Bath, Durham) will remain intact as long as there is a class system to feed it; a new generously funded research superleague (Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, bits of London and Warwick) is beginning to hit the incomes of the second division, often the provincial redbricks, which just fail to get top ratings; some ex-polytechnics are still growing fast and devoting themselves to new teaching and elarning methods; medical schools are trying, with difficulty, to defend their patch; some of the old university third division are still in deep financial trouble; former teacher training colleges are asserting the benefits of smallness and beauty. The government's policy is simply to let this academic kaleidoscope emerge.

Beneath the surface there are common, quite radical shifts across the board; from old classroom teaching methods to new ways of learning, from full-time study to part-time study, from whole three-year courses to chopped-up smaller modules, from pure to applied research, from academic to vocational courses. Old boundaries are eroding, especially the increasingly meaningless one between "higher" and "further" education. New partnerships are developing between universities and further education colleges, between cooperating universities in Europe and beyond, between companies and universities. Where there is less cooperation is between next-door-neighbour universities; for the moment, they are the competition.

It is too early to say how the system will shake down. Central to it all will be the power of research as a university status symbol. Because polytechnics never received any core funding for research, poly lecturers who wanted to research had to fit it in in spare moments. The basic contract for lecturers in the old universities, however, always involved teaching and researching with no real accountability for either function; the global sum paid by the UGC to each university, based on the historic expenditure of more affluent days, never attributed funds to one activity or the other. When polytechnics became universities and separate funding for teaching and research was introduced, a tariff was arrived at for 'teaching' with all the rest of the money allocated for 'research'. The inference was that research is what dons do when they are not teaching.

It was when the government insisted that this separate research money should also be accountable that the old universities successfully fought back; they succeeded in ensuring that the research ratings exercise was operated by academic "peers" against a medieval list of subject categories from archaeology to Tibetan. No one, in the allocation process, is charged with considering national needs. Its effect has been to leave the vast bulk of this research money with the old universities; and nearly two-thirds of it with the superleague. It has inhibited academic development by entrenching research in subjects of low priority and engendered savage competition by all universities, including the former polytechnics, to do better in their research ratings next time.

It will take some time to correct the balance between research and teaching. If one young person in three is to benefit from higher education, teaching must have a far higher priority. Research will need to be far more carefully focused and less generously rewarded; incentives for new methods of teaching and learning will need to be introduced; cooperation will need to be enforced over common services like libraries; and the universities need to be managed far more effectively.

There can be no going back. While there will be plenty of nostalgia for the old leisured regime and one or two universities will still be able to sustain it, the change in culture is here to stay: expansion is happening through steady consumer demand and is now a worldwide phenomenon. As the number of graduate parents increases, so does aspiration for a university education not only among sixth formers, but also among adults of every age.

The greatest danger is that students will be sold short on those avenues to intellectual development that are the prime purpose of a university education. They need time with their teachers. Research accountability, on top of an increased lecturing and assessment load, is all but destroying opportunities for that patient student-teacher contact that once existed in all the best universities and polytechnics. If any new resources are found, they should be devoted to this end.

Christopher Price is principal of Leeds Metropolitan University

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Nyta Mann reports on the government's plans to depoliticise the nation's student unions by cutting their block funding

Soft targets

After intermittent statements of intent over the past 14 years, the government has finally decided to dismantle "the last closed shop": student unions. The main thrust of Education Secretary John Patten's plans, unveiled in the Commons last month, is the splitting off of "core" services, currently provided by the unions, from their "political" activities. The former, not yet fully determined, will continue to receive public funding. The latter will be "opted into" on a subscription basis by individual students, a move that will not only end automatic membership, but will also, crucially, cut the block funding currently handed over to the campus unions each year.

The Conservative Party has long considered the National Union of Students and its active members to be nothing more than a nest of anti-government lefties involved in little study and much agitation, all of it carried out on taxpayers' money. Recent NUS campaigns against the poll tax, student loans, and the Target 70 campaign in 1992 (which aimed to unseat sitting Conservatives in marginal seats with significant student populations), despite being undeniably concerned with the welfare of students, have all added to its place at the head of Tory party demonology.

Manchester University's student union is one of the biggest in the country. "To say we just sit back and get funded by public money is rubbish," says union officer Zoë Conway. "The government isn't taking into account the many diverse things we do, and that student unions are actually quite sophisticated organisations." Representing 15,000 students, Manchester SU currently receives £750,000 a year in block funding, which it boosts into a turnover of more than £2 million with its own nightclub, bars and catering facilities.

According to the blueprint for reform, accommodation, catering, sports and welfare services will be designated "core" activities. "Political" activities destined to lose funding include more than just the obvious Labour and Conservative clubs; provisions for overseas students, such as the university's Bangladeshi Society and Pakistani Students' Society, face the chop. Creche and nursery facilities, initiated and run by the union, fall into the same grey area and have not, as yet, been designated "core"—despite their strictly being a matter of student welfare.

The university's Student Community Action project, through which more than 500 of its students take part in visiting the elderly, prison visits and soup runs across the city, is another likely casualty. It is services like these that student unions fear are most seriously threatened by the strict definition and what they see as misplaced emphasis on "core welfare services". "The loss of these projects is the scariest thing about these proposals. There is a huge strain on our resources to carry them out as it is, and these new plans are an even bigger worry for their survival," Conway believes.

The proposals also threaten the end of the NUS as a national coordinating body for students, since the restrictions on the use of public funds promise to choke off the affiliation fees, which make up most of its £2.2 million income.

The last time similar reforms were considered was in 1988 during Kenneth Baker's stint at the Education Department. A review of student unions then found that less than 2 per cent of their income was spent on what could be deemed political campaigns, and that turning to a voluntary membership system would be too complicated by far, and could only succeed by imposing a complex and unwieldy bureaucracy. It was concluded that, although ideologically desirable, the proposed changes were impractical and not worth the trouble. John Patten's current attempt is generally adjudged to be politically motivated; after a humiliating retreat in the battle over school tests with the teaching unions, student unions are a far easier, and ultimately powerless, target.

Both the main opposition parties, academics, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, and the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics have joined in criticising the proposals. Sir David Harrison, chair of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals—hardly the most left-wing body—described them as "building a large steamhammer to crack a nut".

Students themselves have been given until November to respond to the government's plans. In an attempt to forestall more drastic government action, the NUS has come up with its own suggested reforms package. It includes an opt-*out* conscience clause for students who would rather not be members, and for student unions to be granted charitable status, which carries its own in-built restrictions on political activity.

The NUS is hoping that, between now and November, the combined representations of all those opposed to the changes will cause John Patten—or whoever may replace him—to, once again, conclude that no other institution will do their job any better. "If the plans go through, they will be devastating for student representation," says NUS national officer Louise Clarke. Already denied safety-net benefits such as income support and housing benefit, and faced with ever-decreasing grants, there is a fear that the last thing students have left, a collective voice, is about to be taken away. And all, so the suspicion goes, out of political spite. "There are all sorts of other consumer associations that people don't have to pay for individually to be represented, but it seems that students are going to be the one group that will have to pay if they want to speak."

Subterranean Homeless Blues

(Apologies to Bob Dylan)

Johnny's in the government thinkin' 'bout the citizen
We're on the television seein' if he'll let us in
Man in a smooth suit/voice fruit/face fraught
Says we're all in bad shape/need escape/pass port
Look out kid don't matter what they bid
Sod's law when but they're bound to try again
We better jump on the six o'clock
Lookin' for a new trick
The man in the frame game claims we're "sick"
Ten million watchin' we'd better act quick

Maggie came hotfoot/voice full of jackboot
Talkin' to the sick but sounded like a Queen Tut
Johnny says that any vote's worth the price of creosote
Even pay a nanny goat if you get to stay afloat
Look out kid don't matter where we're hid
We better join the freakshows/Strike a neat pose
For those who speak prose/lookin' through our windows
You don't need a stethoscope
To diagnose their sucrose

Aaah play dead/loose skin/livin' outa dustbins
House of tin/face thin/with a photogenic grin
Typhoid/typhus/anythin' to make a fuss
In the dust/ Say You must make a front page outa us
Look out kid we're worth a few quid
To boozers/bleeders/tabloid readers
Reachin' out to feed us
The man in the peak cap's lookin' for a cheap snap
Headline and the leaders
Tell you how he freed us

Get born/look forlorn/listen what the hack says
In a mess/abscess/we could pay his taxes
Lie still/don't shift/don't ignore a horse gift
Twenty weeks of shelling and they put you on an airlift
Look out kid they're liftin' the lid
Better be an example just in case they trample
Grain of rice/plague of lice/looks as if it's ample
Wanna be relaxin'/better not have black skin
A stump might work
If it dangles at an angle

Bill Greenwell

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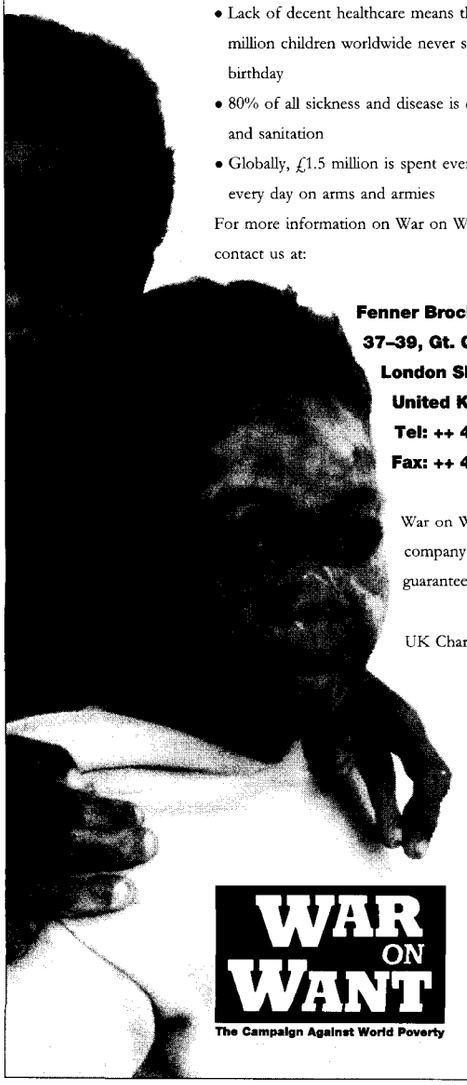
- 80% of all sickness and disease is due to unsafe water and sanitation
- Globally, £1.5 million is spent every minute of every day on arms and armies

For more information on War on Want's work please contact us at:



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FORGET MAASTRICHT

The new Europe is being shaped in secret by ministers and civil servants working outside the EC's democratic structures. It means clampdowns on refugees, undercover surveillance, and uncontrolled exchange of "intelligence" by the continent's police and security forces.

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Keeping the pending tray topped up

"Major awakens conscience of the world" is the view from Number Ten on Operation Irma. I may be exaggerating, but only slightly. Downing Street sources really did say earlier this week: "The good news is that we've started this ball rolling and now it looks like everyone else is joining in."

"Credit is due to the British media for highlighting this problem and to the British government for responding to it," they suggested. This is asking too much. What happened was more a case of: "Inept British PM moves other countries to act."

The rest of the world might never have heard of little Irma and the other medical emergencies, had it not been for the slanging-match between Major and the UNHCR. The row over the supermarket in blonde, blue-eyed babies became an international news story. Only then, for their own domestic reasons, did other countries decide to pitch in.

As the *Times* reported earlier this week, eight wounded children from Sarajevo arrived unnoticed for treatment at a hospital in Rome last month. There was no bandwagon then. So I suppose we can be grateful to Major for making such a mess of his publicity stunt. As a result, there are definite offers of medical assistance from around the world for more than 1,200 injured Bosnians.

Of these, we are only taking 21, although we are assured, excitingly, that our forces "stand ready" to fly more people out if necessary. But Downing Street is satisfied that it need not come to that, now that the torch has been passed on to others. "The fact is that other countries will now want to play their part," said government sources.

Our lack of assistance to the wounded has been matched by our lack of generosity towards Bosnian refugees. The harsh face of the British government was on display last November, when 46 Bosnians were deported (for having set foot on a third country's soil, such as France or Germany's, before ours), and a coachload of refugees bound for Britain was left stranded in Slovenia. That same month, visa requirements were imposed for the first time on Bosnians.

Since then, matters have been handled more discreetly. Nobody has been deported, but, there again, hardly anybody has been admitted. Towards the end of last year, Britain promised to take up to 1,000 former prison camp detainees and their dependents (roughly 4,000 in all), but only one-fifth have taken up the offer so far. In part, this is owing to the tough definition of dependents, which was limited, until recently, to wives and children under 18. Under pressure from the Red Cross, Britain has now conceded that children up to the age of 19 and elderly dependent relatives can be allowed in.

Additionally, there are some 8,000 citizens of the former Yugoslavia—Croats, Serbs and Kosovo Albanians, as well as Bosnians—who came to Britain on tourist visas and have applied for asylum. So far, the Home Office has simply sat on their cases. Not one of them has been given refugee status nor even "exceptional leave to remain".

Britain is not alone in putting their cases in the pending tray. All over Europe, countries are holding off granting former Yugoslav refugees any kind of permanent status. However, just compare the numbers. Germany has taken in 250,000 refugees; Switzerland 100,000; Sweden 70,000; Austria 65,000; France 26,000; Italy 20,000; Turkey 20,000; Denmark 11,000; and the Netherlands 11,000. Not all these countries are near-neighbours of Bosnia, so why should we be at the bottom of the table?

It is now practically impossible to get into Britain from Bosnia, unless it is on a stretcher, like Irma. The nearest visa office is the British consulate in Zagreb and the border between Bosnia and Croatia is sealed to all but aid convoys. In any case, the consulate is under strict instructions not to issue visas to people who look like refugees, so it is scarcely worth making the hazardous journey.

It is now practically impossible to get into Britain from Bosnia, unless it is on a stretcher, like Irma

In fairness, it shoud be noted that Britain is helping Bosnia in other ways. There are 2,800 British troops involved in the UN peacekeeping operation in the former Yugoslavia, and it is costing the taxpayer a lot of money: £82 million for the year 1992-93.

On the other hand, the presence of British UN forces has been used by Major throughout the conflict as a reason for rejecting military intervention. Earlier this week, Downing Street wearily reaffirmed that: "The threat of air strikes remains, but we all know that there are problems going down that route." In fine diplomatic style, the government also refused to engage in the dispute over whether or not Sarajevo was under siege. "Siege is not a term that we use one way or another," according to Number Ten.

To date, Britain has not even lived up to its existing commitments. After the siege of Srebrenica, the UN designated six Muslim safe areas and promised to send extra troops to them, if necessary. While the shelling has continued, nearly 1,000 British soldiers assigned to that task have been kicking their heels at home, waiting for the call-up.

This has not prevented the humanitarian relief effort from being the occasion for great self-congratulation on the part of the government. A recently published memorandum to the Foreign Affairs Committee prepared by Tim Lankester, permanent secretary at the Overseas Development Administration, expresses the official view: "Because we now have a capacity to assess what is needed and respond rapidly, it is a type of aid we are much better than many others at providing." Aid agencies such as Oxfam and Save the Children do not doubt that the British troops are performing admirably in difficult circumstances in Bosnia.

But, as the ODA memorandum goes on to make clear: "The money spent saving lives now is at the expense of funds for development and improving people's lives in future." Once again, the government is not being as generous as it appears.

For years, Lynda Chalker has been thought of as a quietly able and competent minister for overseas development. Indeed, she has virtually been given the job for life, having been awarded a peerage within days of losing her marginal seat. By all accounts, she has fought many battles to keep the ODA's budget intact. But last autumn, she lost the argument, and the aid budget for developing countries was frozen for three years.

Despite a commitment in the Conservative Party manifesto to reach the UN's target for aid of 0.7 per cent of GNP, a pledge that was also made at the Earth Summit in Rio and enshrined in the Maastricht treaty, ODA spending is falling to an all-time low. Labour's Michael Meacher has just released figures showing that it will be down from 0.31 per cent of GNP in 1992 to 0.26 per cent by 1995.

The problem with this kind of aid, as the Foreign Affairs Committee noted in its recent report, is that: "Success can only be measured in the long term. Indicators of reduced poverty would be a high GNP per capita, increased production, better infrastructure and social services—all of which only become apparent after time."

John Major craves the benefits of instant publicity. The individuals he helps tend to thank him effusively in front of the cameras. Whole countries and gaggles of anonymous refugees don't.

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SIDELINERS

You probably have not heard of F Bloggs, partly because he has been silenced during the Maastricht debate by longstanding contradictory feelings. Although he considered himself a "good European"—with three languages—in 1975 he voted against staying in the EEC.

While understanding Ted Heath and Roy Jenkins' dream of a United States of Europe to resist its domination by the US, he was getting contradictory signals from his Washington intelligence contacts. Despite the EEC's threats to American food exports, US strategists were willing to allow western Europe to build its semi-separate economic and military strength as part of their "dumbbell strategy". Western Europe would develop itself as a solid steel ball able to resist Russian strength initially, but always linked to the other steel ball in North America.

Bloggs has also been troubled by the fact that "Euro-enthusiasts" have seemed so little troubled over the corruption of European culture by third-rate American exports. When did any of the "Euro-enthusiasts" complain that British TV is dominated by US exports? When have they demanded a higher proportion of films from France and Italy, or European joint productions? Curiously enough, Bloggs has found it easier to find Polish or Hungarian films on the BBC.

Bloggs is also puzzled that "Euro-enthusiasts" never insist that the new generation of Britons be able to speak the languages of the west Europeans they are expected to embrace. If we are going to be "at the centre of things", how can we operate effectively if we cannot speak other languages? How can we out-manoeuvre others, including the multilingual Dutch and Belgians, if we take up only half our quota of Brussels jobs, because we cannot produce enough top officials capable of operating in anything but English? How can we export effectively to an enlarged Germany if so few of our secondary schools actually teach German? If German bankers run the European Central Bank, as expected, will the new top Germans understand English, after the passing of those whose English was learned postwar to suck up to the Americans?

What dismays Bloggs most of all is that so few "Euro-enthusiasts" accept that the end of the "cold war" in 1989-90 undermined the whole foundation on which the Community had been built. Without dangerous Russian opponents, Washington has little need to sustain and manipulate the European end of its "dumbbell". Its toleration of French protectionism is evaporating fast. US respect for the EC has shrivelled as it has shown itself incapable of mounting a Yugoslav solution, while blocking any "surgical" strike by the US Air Force. Bloggs is sure we are in a whole new ball-game, since his optimistic mother christened him "forward-looking". He does not expect right "Euro-enthusiasts" to adjust, since their basic reaction to the ERM collapse was to urge us to dive straight into a single currency.

Andrew Roth

EDWARD PEARCE

Certainly the House of Lords isn't democratic, but then what is?

Difficult to be fair about the House of Lords. It must have been denounced in the *New Statesman* back in the days of Clifford Sharp. Part hereditary, part nominated, it is, of course, undemocratic. The great organ voice of democratic England does not speak through it.

Anthony Charles FitzClarence, the seventh generation of the liaison between William IV and Dorothy Jordan, the actress, sits as Earl of Munster, the title the King bestowed on the eldest son of his 20-year alliance. One could make a lot of Bertie Woosterish copy out of that. But is it less creditable than the elevation of the residual head of what was, in its great days, the most corrupt and destructive trade union grouping in western Europe? One can argue, justly, that Brenda Dean is not to blame for the sins of the old gang, that she is an intelligent woman who will make what politics calls "a positive contribution to public life".

I cannot get angry with the House of Lords in the way that I fervently do with the futile monarchy

Equally, however, Lord Munster is not answerable for the shortcomings of the Duke of Clarence and, as a glass engraver and expert on glass design, he represents something useful and can make a similar contribution. As a graphic designer with the *Daily Mirror* in his youth, he must surely have been a member of a sister union to Lady Dean's. Monarchy and the old mafiosi end of the unions have quite a lot in common; and both throw up perfectly respectable progeny. (The only regret for the Windsors is that their family tree contains no one of the calibre of Dorothy Jordan who delighted Lamb and Hazlitt: "No rhetoric in her passion, or it was nature's own rhetoric", "all gaiety, openness and good nature".)

The Lords is still a nonsense, containing the descendants of talent and the nominees of office: Nelsons sit for Nelson, Salisburys for Cecils and Tenbys for Lloyd Georges, along with the trade unionists and former ministers. It is also by definition elderly. Ear trumpets are to hand, the progress of many noble lords is laborious, something to which the courtliness of the place—interruption being unthinkable—merely emphasises. The word "deliberative" takes on a whole new meaning.

And yet, and yet; no one obliged to listen to either of the Lords' debates because a features editor wanted a piece about Mrs Thatcher's unremarkable contributions, would doubt that they were *good* debates, that old hands like Peter Thorneycroft and indeed Cecil Parkinson, Douglas Jay and Lord Wilberforce said things well worth saying. The merit of the Lords is that it has the reserves and breadth to be expert. You want civil and structural engineering, try Lord Mais, very big business, the Lords Mcfadzean, social science, Lord Runciman, history, Lord Bullock or a thousand other things, the elevation of distinguished men has provided it.

With them are, of course, the hacks, the party backstage crawlers and the suppliers, by appointment, of money to the Conservative and Unionist Party and, with them, "the twelfth transmitters of a foolish face". Cromwell called English land law "an ungodly jumble". The House of Lords, reserve of expert knowledge and intellectual distinction, accident of birth, selection "made at random from the ranks of the unemployed", sunset home, backstop of common sense that delayed the killing of the GLC, is all of that. It is English eclecticism run wild, and I cannot get angry with it in the way I fervently do with the futile monarchy.

The undemocratic nature of their Lordships' House is, of course, echoed by the uncertain democracy of the Commons. Away from gala occasions like by-elections, the choice of a Conservative Association, numbering perhaps 300 participants, is the certain "inheritor" of each of about 300 seats, while the nominee of local Labour parties engaging perhaps 70 active people each is heir to about 230. Perhaps 120 seats are actual contests between similar nominees.

Certainly, we must change the Lords—firstly by removing all political nominations, except those of former senior ministers; second, by confining the House to regular attenders and turning distinguished inheritors into nominees. The only question about the nominees is who will nominate them. But the present system, minus the party hacks and paymasters, could be worse, and any committee of the Great and Good would itself only be nominated by the parties.

And what on earth shall we do about democratising the House of Commons?

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India's ruling Congress party may well have survived a vote of no-confidence, says **Praful Bidwai**, to end up presiding over the disintegration of democracy itself

Storm clouds gather over New Delhi

If there is one thing that Prime Minister P V Narashima Rao's supporters and detractors agree on, it is that his victory in the parliamentary no-confidence motion of 28 July was largely Pyrrhic and cannot ensure his survival for any length of time.

The contentious debate in the Indian parliament and in the ruling Congress party provided yet another sign of the rapidly eroding credibility of the government and of Rao's acceptability as a leader. It may only be a prelude to a fresh, and grimmer, crisis.

The government managed to survive by the skin of its teeth, defeating the no-confidence motion by no more than 14 votes, the narrowest margin ever in the history of the 543-member Lower House of India's parliament. This was primarily because seven members belonging to an opposition group were induced to defect to the Congress party at the last moment. The motion saw wholly disparate parties (for example, the right-wing Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party and the centrist-communist National Front-Left Front alliance) in the otherwise fractious opposition come together, even as the Congress's traditional allies deserted it—most notably the all-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, which rules the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

Aside from plain opportunism—except for the left, India's amorphous political parties are not known for consistent positions—what brought the opposition together was its leaders' perception of the Congress party's rapidly declining popularity and the high risks associated with supporting, or remaining neutral towards, an increasingly shaky government whose viability is in question. The latest opinion poll published by *India Today* magazine forecasts that Congress is today slated to win no more than 198 seats—against the 245 it actually won two years ago, the 272 it needs for a simple majority, and the 290 it polled in April 1992. Of particular significance is the party's decline in the south, where it performed relatively well in the last two general elections.

The Rao government is believed to have survived the opposition onslaught mainly because it heavily bribed individual MPs and promised four MPs representing a tribal region in eastern India a separate state—a long-standing demand that is likely to be strongly resisted by the mainly non-tribal ruling parties of Bihar and Orissa.

Disclosures of such inducements have not gone down well with the public, which has a poor opinion of unscrupulous political operators and of governments tainted with serious charges of corruption. But this time around, even dyed-in-the-wool members of the Congress party have been shaken by the exposure of their leaders' dependence on small groups of defectors.

More importantly, the developments of the last fortnight have revealed deep fissures inside the ruling party itself. The Congress remains divided among numerous factions, the most significant of them being led respectively by Prime Minister Narisimha Rao; human resources development minister and party heavyweight Arjun Singh; and former defence minister and now Maharashtra chief minister Sharad Pawar. While factionalism is nothing new in the party, the difference this time is that Narasimha Rao functions more and more as a mere faction leader and one without much stable or reliable support in his own party. He lacks mass appeal and has not fulfilled the one requirement that has mattered most to members of Congress for a quarter of a century: the leader's ability to attract votes and steer the party to electoral victory.

Rao is now more busy fighting a series of defensive battles against his critics in the party, the opposition and the larger public, than in running a government with a programme or purpose other than its own survival. Political manoeuvres around the no-confidence vote saw Rao's party rivals come dangerously close to joining hands with the opposition to pull the government down. Indeed, the National Front-Left Front made it plain that it favoured a change in Congress's leadership and that it would support the secular and left-inclined Arjun Singh should he replace Rao.

The vote was thus a close call for a Prime Minister already buffeted by numerous charges of misdemeanour and corruption: direct responsibility for a $2 billion scam involving the securities market; accepting a bribe of $300,000 in cash in two suitcases from the broker (Harshad Mehta) who is the principal accused in the scam; causing a loss of over $1 billion to the exchequer through the sale of public sector equity at prices way, way below the market worth; shielding those who received or brokered bribes in the notorious $2.7 billion howitzer deal with the Swedish firm, Bofors, including the powerful London-based Hinduja brothers.

The Rao government has no convincing answers to these charges and has used the most devious of tactics, including evasion, prevarication, delay and outright perjury, to deal with them, or suppress them.

Dario Mitidier/Select

This "suitcase capitalism" image means a further setback to the Rao government which has been guilty of appeasing the extreme right-wing Hindu communalist BJP and its even more militant allies, and thus allowing the 450-year-old Ayodhya mosque to be demolished on 6 December last year. This was in blatant defiance of the orders of the highest court of the country, and in flagrant breach of solemn official commitments to defend and preserve the structure, which has long been the communalists' target in their revenge against "history's wrong". This, they claim, was the demolition by the Mughal emperor Babur of what they believe (without historical evidence) to have been a temple to Lord Rama, in order to build a mosque.

The Ayodha incident on 6 December was

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Bombay in flames: destruction of the mosque at Ayodha last December was followed by the worst communal riots in India since Partition

followed, especially in Bombay, by the worst communal killings since Partition in 1947. This crisis has severely dented the Rao government's credibility. Recent investigations by two Citizens' Tribunals into the Ayodhya episode and its impact, and the Bombay pogrom of January, reveal the shocking complicity of the local police and the central and state authorities in the build-up to the crisis, its duration and its aftermath. Indeed, without state support, abettment and appeasement, it is inconceivable that the mosque would have been demolished and hundreds of people—a majority of them Muslims—killed without anyone being punished, or even charged and brought to trial, for these grave crimes.

The situation after 6 December has not been just another eruption of communal rioting: it poses the most serious threat to the secular-pluralist constitutional order in independent India. The government's answer to that threat has been pusillanimous, even supine. Rao has, in fact, tried to appropriate the BJP's temple platform rather than fight it. There is no sign that he will fulfil the promise he made to rebuild the mosque. Indeed, an illegal makeshift temple was erected on the site by the BJP's followers between 6 and 7 December, even as the Rao government passively watched.

But the failure to meet this grave challenge to secularism is only one facet of India's generalised political crisis. The country has witnessed the steady weakenening and undermining of its democratic institutions. The party system has suffered serious erosion. Parliament has virtually ceased to be a forum of political debate or policy-making, which is increasingly done in a sly and secretive manner, often at the behest of external or internal agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF. (Memoranda of understanding on economic policy have been signed by Finance Minister Manmohan Singh in breach of parliamentary privilege. He has made long-term, and often irreversible, commitments to these without proper mandate.)

The judicial system, creaking under the burden of millions of pending cases and horrendously long delays, is a picture of abysmal failure to deliver justice. The bureaucracy and the police are marked by levels of nepotism and corruption that increasingly resemble those in banana republics. Now, even the Election Commission, which once enjoyed an enviable reputation of integrity and neutrality, is widely seen to be partisan and unreliable, and is locked in a confrontation with the government and the entire spectrum of political parties after having arbitrarily cancelled all elections and by-elections for the next four months.

Today, a question mark hangs over India's ability to muddle through as a democracy, warts and all, on a broadly secular, pluralist base. The new economic policy has neither achieved stabilisation nor generated an impetus to growth. Two years on, the country is $3 billion deeper in debt and is borrowing yet more just to service newly contracted debt.

Unemployment and poverty ratios are at a historic high, and despite four good monsoons in a row, there is no real hope of a turn around. International credit-rating agencies such as Moody's and Standard and Poor continue to rank India below investment-rating on account of both economic and non-economic factors. The new economic policy is premised on inflows of foreign private investment of the order of $2 to $3 billion a year—but there is only a slim chance that these will materialise. The major shift in India's foreign policy towards a pro-US stance—non-alignment is already a thing of the past—has evidently not helped improve the country's bargaining power.

Even more than economic policy, Indian social policy has moved in a retrograde fashion in recent years, particularly the last two. In the name of liberalisation and reducing the fiscal deficit, the government has instituted brutal cuts in real spending on health, education, drinking-water supply, sanitation and such paltry welfare programmes as there once were.

With a persistent inflation rate of around 10 per cent and a general recession, the result of these policies has been a dramatic rise in poverty and destitution, a considerable deterioration in the situation of the old and very young, and greater gender inequality and discrimination against women.

Narashima Rao has presided over the disintegration of the great project that India set itself at independence. His only agenda is his own survival. This has never been more incompatible with the priorities of democracy, secularism and justice.

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The first trans-European conference of disabled people rejected their traditional passive roles. **John Williams** was there

Maastricht agreement

As Jacques Delors struggled from his sick bed to convene a meeting of his fellow EC commissioners for a damage-assessment review of the then impending ERM collapse, EUR'ABLE, the first trans-European conference of the disabled, was massing in Maastricht to discuss the implications of European economic and political union.

The ERM crisis gave the conference an ominous context. It was as if the disabled had laboured mightily to board the political train from Maastricht, only to find that, now they had finally made it to their seats, the locomotive had broken down.

The staging of the conference had certainly entailed an immense amount of work. This was not just because the event could not have happened without the active collaboration of the Dutch government and the disabled movement in Holland and elsewhere, in the form of the Dutch Independent Living Movement, the Dutch Council of the Disabled and the Disabled People International (Europe).

It involved an in-depth politicisation of many participants, who embraced a radical critique

The sheer effort involved in physically adapting the town of Maastricht to the needs of the 450 disabled delegates showed just how much Europe has to change to meet the needs of the disabled. The conference organisers created an alternative transport system (although they couldn't do anything about air travel: they advised the use of Amsterdam's Schipol airport, right the other side of the Netherlands, instead of the local one); and they adapted the Hoensbroek campus so that delegates could stay there (disabled-friendly hotel accommodation in Maastricht is almost non-existent).

But the work was worthwhile—for the most part. EUR'ABLE was, in, in the words of Kalle Konkkola, a Finn and leading member of the Disabled Peoples' International, "an exercise in the disabled defining themselves, why they are discriminated against, and how to combat such discrimination". And this defining process involved an in-depth politicisation of many participants, who embraced a radical critique of the passive role imposed on the disabled by the charitable orientation of existing welfare systems and upon an emphasis on the central importance of the right to "independent living".

As the final statement from the conference put it:

"We reject the definition of disability as an individual tragedy.

"We demand that regional and sub-regional bodies, the European Community, the Council of Europe, the Conference on Security & Cooperation in Europe, government, policy-makers, the media and non-disabled people recognise that disability is a human rights issue and that our equal opportunities will only be implemented through social and economic change."

The EC was roundly condemned for allowing its disability policy to be formulated by the non-disabled, but there was also a widespread sense that the EC has real potential. In the words of Rachel Hurst, a leading member of the Disabled Peoples' International: "With a formalised policy-making structure in the European Community, we have a better opportunity than any other region of the world to ensure that disabled people, disabled Europeans, will have the right to fully and equally participate in society."

Not all was consensus. Vassilis Spontas, secretary-general of the International Union of Architects, whose conspicuously charitable capacity as a member of the board of the Greek Spastics Society, combined with a haplessly disablist manner, on occasion found him functioning as the proverbial red rag to the bull.

From a very different perspective, John Moeller, president of the Danish Council of Organisations of the Disabled, lamented the prevalence of the anti- discrimination legislation lobby in the European disabled movement, arguing that such a strategy encourages a ghetto mentality.

But most of the problems were those common to all coalition politics, made particularly severe by the fact that the disabled movement consists of various mono-disability groups. As Ab Vreithoff, chair of the Dutch Council of the Disabled, said: "Just to say that you are in the same situation as disabled gays, lesbians, feminists or black migrants and so on, just to say that you share some of the same kinds of problems, is not the same as becoming constructive allies."

There was also a singular failure to address the effects of the cold war division of Europe on disabled people in eastern Europe, one hopes simply because of an oversight in not setting aside time and facilities for networking in the conference framework. The political need, experience and energy were there. I set up a gathering of east Europeans which developed into a vibrant and evidently informative experience-sharing session—but I was left as a bemused onlooker because of the inadequate translation facilities.

John Williams is a member of the steering committee of the Socialist Society.

INFLUENCES

KEITH FLETT
Letter writer

What books and authors have had the greatest influence on your political beliefs?
The Making of the English Working Class by E P Thompson, and Tony Cliff's *State Capitalism in Russia*, both about working class liberation.

Name one film, one book, one play, one poem and one piece of music you would most like everyone to see, read or hear.
Film: Monty Python's *Life of Brian*—Perhaps the song "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life" should replace "The Red Flag" as the Labour Party anthem?
Book: Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution.*
Play: Trevor Griffiths' *The Comedians.*
Poem: Brecht's "A Worker Reads History".
Music: Jimi Hendrix's version of Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower".

In the early stages of your life, which figure stands out as an important influence on you?
Just living in north London in the 60s and 70s was an important influence on me. Otherwise I was born with a beard at a typewriter.

What event during your lifetime has had the greatest effect on your political beliefs?
The 1984-85 miners' strike; proof that neither the working class or class struggle are dead.

Which political figure, living or dead, do you most admire?
Lenin. Not to admire or worship, but to learn from as someone who had the vision to carry through a project for working-class emancipation in 1917, albeit later defeated.

If you could visit any time in history for 24 hours, which would you choose?
The Chartist demonstration on Kennington Common on 10 April 1848—perhaps a turning point in working-class history, and it would save me weeks in the British library.

What do you consider the greatest threat at present to individual freedom and liberty?
American imperialism, the new world order, and those on the left who apologise for them.

On important matters, whose opinion—other than your own—do you trust most?
On general isues, *Socialist Worker* and the members of my union branch. On personal issues, my parents, comrades and friends.

Who is the greatest prime minister we never had?
Victor Grayson, the Labour MP who moved adjournment on a Commons debate on temperance on 15 October 1908 on the grounds that the unemployed were starving in the streets outside. Had Grayson been Labour leader and prime minister in 1924, things might have been rather different.

If you could pass one law, what would it be?
A law to bring British morality into the 20th century. Sub-clauses: the opening of pubs on Sunday afternoons, and the lowering of the age of gay consent to 16.

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Two of the ongoing debates in NSS's letters pages continue this week. The more important one is about Anti-Racist Alliance secretary Marc Wadsworth's appearance on the same television show as various representatives of Britain's far-right (Shoreditch, 16 July). Among the studio guests was Patrick Harrington, former National Front leader, and now head of an NF off-shoot called Third Way.

Last week, Jim Boumhela (Letters, 13 August) defended Wadsworth's honourable record in dealing with fascists when he was a full-time journalist, including getting Patrick Harrington thrown out of North London Polytechnic. In response, Searchlight editor Gerry Gable writes: "For your readers' information, Marc Wadsworth's Thames News interview with Patrick Harrington did not lead to [Harrington] being removed from North London Polytechnic. He completed his course there, and was awarded a degree in philosophy, by attending each day with two plain clothes officers to protect him from the anger of his fellow students and many of the staff, rather than the media."

But Gable's real argument with Wadsworth is that there is a crucial difference between "interviewing racists and nazis as part of one's job as a journalist, and sharing a platform with them. Searchlight has an international reputation for the large number of TV programmes it has made exposing fascism and racism, which could not have been put together without interviewing the enemies of democracy to get at the truth. This does not mean having to share platforms with them in political terms."

The question of when—if ever—it is acceptable to permit the far right to take advantage of the principles of democracy to further their anti-democratic aims is a tricky one. Whether to be there when they do so is even trickier. On the one hand, any nonsense Harrington (for example) comes out with can, and should, be countered in a studio debate by others present. On the other hand, Harrington gets the chance to appear in the same setting as, say, Labour and Tory politicians. The fear is that he and his ilk eventually worm their way into the accepted political mainstream. It's a dilemma with no easy solution.

Also on the subject of Searchlight, Larry O'Hara takes NSS to task for having published extracts from At War With Society by Tim Hepple ("The Reich stuff", 13 August). "It was with consternation that I read the extract from Hepple's recent autobiography," he says. "If Mr Hepple was just what he claims to be—an infiltrator into the right—then I would have little to quarrel about. However, this is a man who has not only boasted of working with military intelligence, but has also spied on the left/greens . . . " O'Hara goes on to outline the details of a longstanding feud between himself and Searchlight. Far too complicated to do justice to here, it involves both parties to the dispute accusing each other of being hand in glove with fascist groups; there are also allegations concerning agents provocateurs and MI5 links. Yes, that sort of thing. O'Hara has brought out a pamphlet detailing his many grievances. Whatever the merits of his case may be, I doubt myself whether the publication of his booklet will do it much good. But NSS readers will want to see for themselves, and can get a copy by sending £1.80 (in blank postal orders or stamps) to Larry O'Hara, BM Box 4769, London WC1N 3XX.

The Keith Flett debate, though less significant, has generated a large amount of mail recently. The argument has moved on from the initial "Why so many letters from Keith Flett?" stage, and is now at the "Why so many letters about Keith Flett?" phase. One consolation for those who come down on the side of restraining Keith from seeing his name in print is that he sends in even more than you see, and by no means gets all his letters published. And don't worry, Keith's appearance in "Influences" this week is not the harbinger of the much-feared Keith Flett column, but serves to knock the whole debate on the head: I declare this correspondence closed. Hopefully.

Nyta Mann

No choice but pro-choice

When Emily's List UK was launched in February this year, it attracted a great deal of attention, considerable support and some criticism. The comments form the Mary Kenny anti-feminist school of thought were entirely predictable. Emily was written off as another loopy harridan-ridden Labour Party scheme, run by the same "wimmin" who try to stop red-blooded men enjoying Page Three pin-ups.

Less predictable, and more worrying, were the side-swipes (largely from sisters in the Labour Party who should have known better) about middle-class women promoting other middle class women and themselves in particular. For the record, Emily's List UK is about persuading men and women who can afford it (therefore mainly middle class) to give money to help women who cannot afford it (therefore mainly working class) get selected for parliamentary seats. But the thing which has caused the greatest furore is Emily's decision only to sponsor pro-choice women.

The Labour Life Group and associated organisations have mounted a letter-writing campaign (including *NSS* Letters, 23 July) and a lobby of influential party members in an attempt to get Emily's founders to change their minds on this issue. They argue, among other things, that it is undemocratic, anti-working class and illogical because only one policy issue has been chosen out of hundreds. They confuse it with other initiatives like Women into Politics, and accuse the founders of allying themselves with Conservative women against Labour women.

The founders of Emily's List UK would like to make it clear that while none of them is pro-abortion, nothing will make them change their minds on the pro-choice issue. They know that no woman takes such a difficult and sad decision lightly, and look forward to the day when contraception, social conditions and family stability have rendered abortion obsolete. In the meantime, they will do everything in their power to ensure that British women retain the right to choose. Imagine if Emily sponsored a woman who, when elected to parliament, got together with other MPs of the same persuasion and overturned the 1967 Abortion Act, removing the rights of millions of other British women to choose how to control their own bodies and their own fertility? This terrible blow would be all the more devastating if it was self-inflicted, and is the reason why the founders of Emily feel that, where the women it sponsors are concerned, there is no choice but pro-choice.

Labour, like Emily, is pro-choice but not pro-abortion, and our stance is completely in line with the 1992 manifesto. But even if it were not, the founders cannot see the logic of an organisation established specifically to promote women, in supporting women who attack women's rights. The Labour Life Group is out of step with the majority of the party on this issue, and their isolation is compounded by their vociferous attacks on people who disagree with them. We realise that the pro-choice criteria will prevent a minority of women from being sponsored by Emily's List, but we think that this would only be undemocratic if there were no other organisations prepared to sponsor Labour women into parliament. As it is, there are several, and there is no reason why the seemingly well-financed anti-choice lobby should not set up a donor network of its own.

Emily believes that women should be free to choose whether or not they have an abortion. That, surely, is the democratic attitude. Labour Life believes that women should not be free to choose whether or not to have an abortion, and would take the decision for them by outlawing abortion. That, surely, is the totalitarian attitude. It is also the attitude which inflicts untold suffering on thousands of women.

In the 26 years since its passage through parliament, the 1967 Abortion Act has come under attack 22 times. It is only the vigilance and hard work of MPs like Jo Richardson that has stopped the erosion of women's rights in this country. One of Emily's tasks is to put more women into the House of Commons to help her safeguard our freedom.

Barbara Follett, Glenys Thornton
Emily's List UK
London NW3

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Labour's panic attack

Lesley Moody (Letters, 6 August) is quite right to point out the contrast between Gordon Brown's announcement that Labour would not increase taxation of salaries above £40,000, and Charles Kennedy's announcement that the Liberal Democrats could increase income tax by one per cent if necessary. The implications for both parties are significant.

Labour's apparent change of heart is not based on a long-term view of where it wants to go, but on a panic reaction about its public image. The Labour leadership believes, with justice, that it lost the last election partly because it was seen as a high tax party. Brown's move is an attempt to allay those fears. The problem is, however, more fundamental than this, because the Liberal Democrats also made noises about increasing taxes before the last election, but continued their pre-election surge.

The key issue here is that Labour is not trusted on taxation not so much because of high taxation *per se*, but that Labour is not trusted to spend money wisely. The Lib Dems do not have this problem.

Labour's attempt to get rid of the problem by promising not to raise taxes actually makes its problems worse, not better. If Labour continues to pose as a party of reform, then the questions will always be asked how the reforms are to be paid for. And if it fudges on this issue, as it did before the last election, by saying it will spend only when money is available, then it will create uncertainty which its opponents will exploit.

In the current situation, this may well favour the Liberal Democrats. Faced with two would-be reforming parties, one of which says it will never raise taxes while the other talks of cautious tax rises, those voters who want reforms may well decide that the Lib Dems are the better bet.

Unless Labour reverses Gordon Brown's panic attack, it may well find itself losing its hard-core voters to the Lib Dems.

Trevor Fisher
Stafford

THIS ENGLAND

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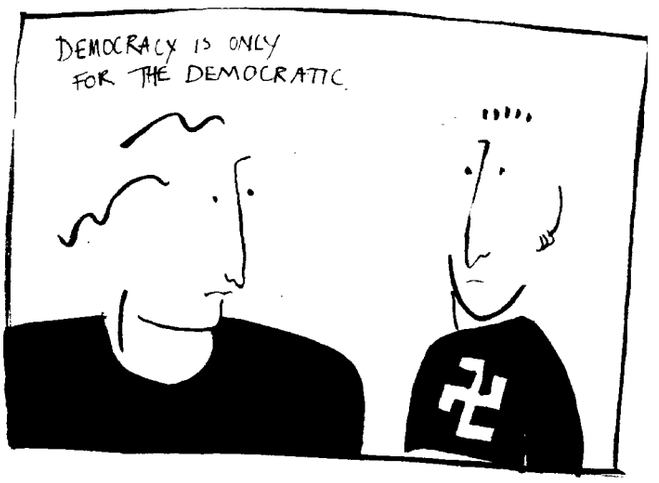
• Two brothers, battling over which should inherit two model locomotives handmade by their father in the last years of his life, have settled their dispute in the High Court, London.

Facing the "enormous cost" of a protracted court action, Mr Keith Edwards, of Roehampton Gate, south-west London, and his brother Anthony, of Heath House, Milton Common, Oxon, agreed that each should have one of the model trains.—*Daily Telegraph* (Tim Hopkins)

• The pamplet and illustrations in this brochure are used primarily to evoke a theme and therefore do not necessarily constitute sights that can currently be seen or methods of transport that may be used.—From "Classic Journeys" in the Voyages of Jules Verne brochure (Janet Gyford)



Disturbing democracy

Tim Hepple's reports on the British National Party's headquarters ("The Reich stuff", 13 August and "Inside London's Nazi HQ", 6 August) are certainly disturbing and make it easy to understand why so many people want to shut it down. But would that really be any different from the British government's attempted gagging of Sinn Fein?

My faith in democracy is somewhat shaken at the moment, but pushing for the state to close down any party's headquarters can hardly be a democratic advance. Surely, to be defeated the far-right's fascism has to be exposed for what it is, not simply kept out of public view where it will simply fester like a wound on society's skin.

Simon Kyte
Winkfield
Berkshire

Learning to walk

Victor Keegan ("About face", 6 August), writing after the "break-up" of the ERM, rightly concluded that "we must never again make the mistake of entering a fixed currency system at an over-valued [exchange] rate in order to change our economic behaviour". That would, indeed, once more be putting the cart before the horse.

What was true of sterling, as shown by Black Wednesday and its aftermath, was however not true of the French franc in particular, which is fundamentally sound and could eventually appreciate. The root of the trouble, rather, was two-fold—and the speculative froth was merely a symptom, not the underlying cause.

The first was the singular event—hardly a test case—of German reunification and the resulting internal inflationary pressures which the Bundesbank has had to contain willy-nilly by means of high, and only gradually reduced, interest rates, regardless of the painful consequences for Germany's ERM partners.

Secondly, those partners (Britain included) had only themselves to blame for failing to adjust to those consequences by means of one or more ERM currency realignments well before the dam burst. The ERM's "fixed but adjustable" exchange rates, after all, were supposed to be just that, as indeed they had been in its early stages. To make them that once more, once the dust has settled and narrower fluctuation bands have progressively been restored, is more pertinent than trying (as Mr Keegan proposes) to turn the ERM into a worldwide system on the lines of the post-war Bretton Woods regime, of which John Maynard Keynes was one of the leading architects. Let's walk before we can run.

But just as growth must be non-inflationary if it is to be sustained, and not turn into another boom-bust cycle, so those walking together must walk in step if their exchange rates are to be stable and ultimately, perhaps, replaced by a single currency once the necessary convergence between them has been achieved. Meanwhile, talk of the ERM's "break-up" is premature. The ERM lives, and it (or something like it) will go on until finally, by its achievement, it works itself out of a job.

Walter Grey
London N3

Taming the speculators

Victor Keegan ("About face", 6 August) argues that the single currency project was ill-fated because it was premature. He argues that "divergent economies" made such an idea untenable for the forseeable future. However, his alternative of managed exchange rates is an invitation for further one-way betting by the speculators and more currency instability. The foreign exchange markets can play one currency off against another as long as 12 currencies exist.

The argument is put about by the economic representatives of the exchange traders that differences in inflation and public sector borrowing requirement mean that the European economies are not yet compatible. On this basis, it ought to have been the deutschmark, not the franc, that came under attack; both inflation and public borrowing are higher in Germany. It is true that there are underdeveloped *regions* within Europe. That is why structural adjustment funds exist (over £100 billion annually) for regions like Northern Ireland and southern Italy.

Min Cooper

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The development between most of the EC—France, western Germany, northern Italy—is evenly spread.

With the single currency, the scope for profitable trading between currencies would be enormously reduced. This presents foreign exchange dealers with a motive for destroying the ERM. The Franco-German rift over the question of the level of interest rates simply gave the markets another opportunity to destroy Franco-German cooperation.

A single currency is the only way to destroy the speculators' rule over the EC economy. Only thus can we lay the framework for policies based on the idea of longer-term investment.

S Datta
Kent

Laying claim to history

Francis Beckett's excellent review of Kevin Morgan's *Harry Pollitt* ("Comrades", 13 August) made one sweeping statement that should be qualified. It was not the case that apart from the Communist Party, "everyone else seemed inclined to ignore British fascism" during the mid-1930s.

The CP played a key and vital part in the defeat of Mosley's Blackshirts, although at times it responded impressively to events—for example, the mobilisation of London's East End against Mosley in October 1936—rather than offering a lead. However, others on the left, notably the Independent Labour Party and the Socialist League, not to mention "unaligned" temporary groupings such as the Tyneside Anti-Fascist League (or "Greyshirts"), also made highly significant contributions that should not be overlooked.

The CP did well in the seemingly endless sectarian points-scoring beloved of the British left, and therefore claimed the history of anti-fascism for itself. But the Blackshirts could not have been marginalised so effectively without a broad-based and united anti-fascist campaign. There is a lesson of sorts to be discovered there.

Incidentally, why is *Harry Pollitt* retailing at £40 a copy?

Councillor Nigel Todd
Vice-Chair, Racial Equality Sub-Committee
Newcastle upon Tyne

Inglorious retreat

I have always hated the Tories. The report in *NSS* ("Hong Kong's Tory betrayal", 30 July) says it all for me: "The people of Hong Kong have been betrayed in a way that only British Tories can manage." How true that is! Ever since the Hong Kong issue arose more than a decade ago, the government has been keeping the people of Hong Kong in total darkness during various negotiations with the Peking regime, and depriving them of the right to self-determination. Hong Kong seems to be one of the rare exceptions in the process of decolonisation of former British colonies.

The appointment of Chris Patten as the final governor is just a cosmetic gesture by the government in London. Patten's mission is to ensure that Britain has a "glorious retreat", and it has nothing to do with fighting for democracy.

It is absurd for a colonial power to deliver democracy to its colony; the mere existence of a colonial power itself is undemocratic.

If Patten and his buddies in the Tory Party are really concerned about democracy in Hong Kong, they should immediately give the people here a say in determining their own future. For one thing, all the 60 seats of the Legislative Council should be open for direct election, despite probable objections from Peking.

I doubt the Tory Party would suddenly stand up for us six million "objects". My hometown is being transferred from the hands of London to Peking, from a western colonialist to an eastern despot. There lies the tragedy.

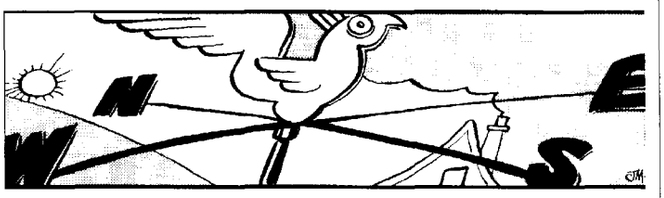
Kin-ming Liu
Hong Kong

Sick as a parrot

Could someone please tell the lads at *NSS* that I was sick as a parrot to read yet another article on football in the magazine last week ("Kick up the grass", 13 August). Football 2, Beer 1, in just four weeks. All right, so the start of the football season may be important to some people, but International Women's Week didn't even rate a mention, let alone a couple of features.

Anna Classey
London NW6

FRINGE BENEFITS



Colin Ward pursues the folklore of the One-Night House

We all have unwritten books. Mine is about the pre-20th-century history of squatting. It's a continuous part of our island story, though you wouldn't think so from the heritage industry. The trouble is that the moment you start talking about the story of the enclosures, the evidence from manorial rolls, or the continuum between "open" and "close" villages, people's eyes glaze over, because they heard too much about that in school history lessons.

But once you mention the universal folklore that if, between sundown and sunrise (or vice versa), you manage to put up a cottage and get a pot boiling or have smoke coming out of the chimney, you can't be evicted, their eyes light up. They tell you, animatedly, about the house on their patch to which this legend applies, and about the pre-planning and subterfuge that enabled the semblance of a cottage to be erected.

It became obvious to me that this was the way to approach an important topic, so I've tried for decades to plot its origins and distribution. In the 1960s, when public libraries still had volumes of the useful Victorian monthly *Notes and Queries*, I followed the rare references, and now that the *Guardian* has found that a feature of the same name is a winner, I've three times sent in my enquiry. No luck so far, but I keep trying.

I even had the nerve to try it out on social history curators at the Museums Association conference. They responded marvellously, with local details of the "mushroom towns" that sprang up in the wake of the canal navvies of the 18th century, and reflections that the same word, *gekekondu*, is used for squatter settlements in Turkey today, describing habitats that arise overnight as, of course, do organised invasions of public land by squatters in Latin America.

Then I approached collectors of fairy tales, thinking that a house that appeared overnight might be an account of the legendary impossible, like a camel passing through the eye of a needle, or Birnam Wood coming to Dunsinane. The fairies let me down. I drew a blank.

But in April, the Chiltern Open Air Museum held a one-day school on *Humble Dwellings*. I couldn't get there, but one of the lecturers, James Moir, directed me towards Welsh sources (*Hafod Unos* or One-Night Houses); to French studies of the same idea, and to the investigations, back in the 1970s, by a barrister, Ann Everton, in the pages of a journal called *The Conveyancer and Property Lawyer*. Solicitors kept writing back to her with tales they encountered in searching out the titles to property.

One theory is that the idea belongs to Celtic lore, since it occurs in Brittany, Cornwall, Wales, Ireland and the west of Scotland. I think its spread is far wider. I don't think that the One-Night house-builders were dramatising a political principle like Winstanley's Diggers at Weybridge. They were simply establishing their right to exist, and were happy thereafter to pay a ground rent. In this, they resemble our own squatters since the 1960s, who have sought very hard just to be accepted as rent-paying tenants. It is a truism of the housing world that some of the most successful co-ops have grown out of "legitimised" squats.

Governments continually seek to eradicate squatting, by making it a criminal, rather than a civil offence. My own aim in my unwritten book would simply be to show that the history of spontaneous settlement is far older than that of the concept of land ownership. Every squatter, since Adam and Eve had problems in the Garden of Eden, has had to assert a moral absolute. Nobody asked to be born, but once on this planet has an obvious right to a share of its space, just for shelter.

The One-Night House, as a claim to this right, may not be the best illustration, but it is the one that actually captures people's imagination. It could have been you or me, trying to get a roof over our heads.

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Car breakers are the modern heroes of environmentalism, says **Jasper Pleydell-Bouverie**. But new laws are threatening their recycling work

The final break-up

August is the month of the car. Holiday tailbacks on the M5 and caravans blocking country lanes are all-too familiar features of the British summer—like blackberry-picking and buckets and spades.

But August is also the start of the new registration and, if last year is anything to go by, there will be another 370,000 cars on the roads by the end of the month. No wonder the government wants to widen the roads. Bumper to bumper, that number of cars would stretch round the M25 about six times—polluting the air and destroying the countryside. Eventually, 370,000 cars to get rid of.

That cars can be recycled is one of the small mercies of the 20th century. Imagine the devastation that would have occurred by now if cars were all thrown away at the end of their lives, tossed into landfill like so many plastic bags. With unwanted vehicles currently accumulating at a rate of 1.5 million a year, the wreckage would be on a gargantuan scale.

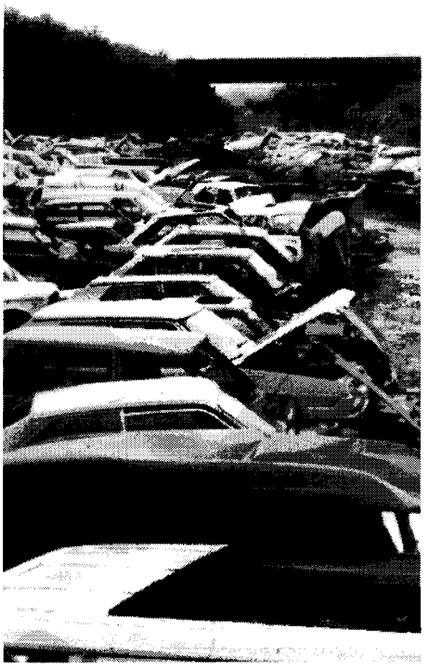
So who do we have to thank that we have not already been submerged?

The country's car breakers, who strip off working parts from old cars to sell directly to the public, and the scrap merchants, who reprocess 90 per cent of the remaining metals, are some of the unsung heroes of our age.

Predictably, the system evolved out of self-interest: both breakers and scrap dealers were able to make considerable profits by collecting and disposing of old automobiles. At the root of their success has been the public's lack of awareness of the value of end-of-life vehicles (ELVs). Cars that have been cherished throughout their working lives, serviced at huge cost in terms of time and components, are given up at the death for practically nothing—£50 at most. Although insurance companies are slightly more canny, selling write-offs for 20 per cent of the insurance payout, there is usually plenty of profit to be had for both breaker and scrap merchant.

Breakers have a huge potential market for used parts. In Britain, large numbers of people baulk at paying extortionate prices for new spares, and breakers provide them with a slightly cheaper alternative. Even the most beaten-up crash victim will still have some working parts that can be sold for good money. Take a Vauxhall Chevette headlight, for example. New, it costs about £75. The breakers do good trade at £25. At the top of the range, a Rolls Royce front grille costs £2,300 new. A used one costs £1,000.

Furthermore, the market is not restricted to Britain. Surprising though it may seem, most



Jasper Pleydell-Bouverie

Heavy metal: good for business

breakers' yards have international connections, sending second-hand parts in bulk to other countries, those in Africa in particular. The Motor Vehicle Dismantlers Association (MVDA) has a bi-monthly magazine containing various international wants and needs—Land-Rover parts for Iceland, Sierra parts for New Zealand, for example.

For the efficient breaker, there have always been potential rich pickings. Although their golden age was ten to 20 years ago, it is rare even now to find a breaker who doesn't have a dated Rolls Royce in his garage or a villa on the Costa del Sol.

Things have worked out particularly well for them because, up until now, the authorities have left them largely to their own devices. Tax collectors may treat them with suspicion, but are generally powerless because most dealing is done in cash and is therefore untraceable. Local authorities, meanwhile, have learnt to tolerate them even though many squat on council land. After all, if breakers didn't dispose of old cars, then who would?

However, the tide has begun to turn against car recyclers. Current market conditions are far from rosy. For the past couple of years, the price of scrap on the world market has been pegged back to its 1976 level. The British Scrap Federation expects this to be a temporary blip, but it has nevertheless caused concern among everyone involved in the trade.

Meanwhile, car design has had an impact. Vehicles are becoming much lighter and therefore less valuable when the hulks are scrapped. In addition, to the annoyance of breakers, many of the metals have been replaced by plastics, most of which cannot be recycled and have to be landfilled at their expense.

Finally, technical components, brought in to reduce pollution, silence engines or massage owners' egos, involve more complicated, systematic dismantling procedures. Traditional breakers still allow the public to clamber over vehicles, ripping bits off at will, but many are aware that such practice can lead to extensive damage. "They rip one bit off and damage two more next door to it," says Peter Atkinson, owner of a yard in south London.

Arguably these market conditions alone might have been enough to prompt change of some sort in the industry. In the event, however, developments have been precipitated by our increased concern for the environment.

In the late 1980s, with talk of the "polluter pays" principle and with environmental legislation being discussed in Brussels and London, car manufacturers were quick to pick up on recycling as both a likely necessity and a potential selling point. BMW proudly announced innovative plans to recycle 80 per cent of its vehicles—unaware that car breakers had been achieving a similar percentage for years. Most other manufacturers frantically boasted about the recyclability of their vehicles, without too much thought as to who was doing the recycling.

Anxious to prove it was serious about the environment, the motor trade set up the Automotive Consortium on Recycling and Disposal in 1991. A broad range of manufacturers sat down to cooperate with people who disposed of their vehicles with the aim of "minimising the adverse environmental impact of end of life vehicle disposal". The meetings proved so popular that the group was considered unwieldy and had to be restructured in July 1992.

Meanwhile, the government and the EC have been pressing ahead with environmental legislation. Of primary importance to car dismantlers are the waste regulations within the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) of 1990. These have yet to be introduced, having been delayed three times, but should eventually mean that all breakers will have to get a licence. This isn't a new idea. Similar demands were made within the Control of Pollution Act of 1974, but were never properly enforced.

To get a licence under EPA, most breakers will have to clean up their acts. The grubbiness of their businesses looks set to be eradicated, with breakers being asked to concrete their yards, purging them of all black oily sludge and providing for adequate collection of toxic fluids. Sanitation of a type associated with hospitals and restaurant kitchens is to invade the breakers' yard.

The MVDA accepts that some sort of legis-

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lation is long overdue, and it would have been far better for the environment if regulations had been imposed from the start. "Essentially licensing is desirable," says Bryan Brewer, MVDA chief executive. Nevertheless the legislation, when coupled with the state of the market, could have a profound effect. Most large breakers have already carried out modernisation. The public are kept out of the yards, and systematic dismantling has replaced haphazard ripping and tearing. All parts are clearly marked, logged on to computers and stored in warehouses. Many breakers use old engine oil to heat their offices. A few are collecting plastics for reprocessing instead of sending them to landfill.

All this sounds like good news. Indeed the changes would be an unqualified success, but for one thing: their cost. Collecting old plastics is unlikely to be profitable. Furthermore, there will be modernisation costs and, under the EPA legislation, breakers will have to pay for their licences and for annual inspections by local authorities.

Undoubtedly, many dismantlers will be forced out of business—either because they cannot meet the demands of the regulations or because they don't want to. Car dismantling has tended to attract entrepreneurial types who prefer to distance themselves from the law. Too much legislation, they say, and the fun goes out of their business.

Another possibility is that many will stay in business outside the law. The 1974 Control of Pollution Act was not efficiently enforced, so what hope is there for EPA? One of the principal difficulties with the legislation is that many local authorities, which will police the legislation, have no idea of the whereabouts of dismantlers and the scale of their operations. Recent attempts to pinpoint breakers yards met with only 25 per cent success. Many are "itinerants" and set up temporary operations in lock-ups and underground garages.

For those who intend to abide by the law, the existence of these cowboys is a matter of concern. "I will do my best to abide by the regulations," says Atkinson. "But there are many who have operations akin to mine who won't pay charges and won't abide by the rules. That's unfair." Brewer agrees. "We are concerned that the local authorities will go for the tethered goats and ignore the free-running game."

The law abiders, with their slick dismantling lines, their draining tanks and their uniformed mechanics, will become even more environment friendly, but will face increasing costs that will reduce their profits. There is every likelihood that they will both put up prices and seek some sort of subsidy—either from the motor industry or from the public.

Meanwhile, many will continue to operate efficiently outside the law. Car breaking is just too easy and too mobile a profession for regulation. All you need is a lock-up garage, a set of spanners and an advertisement in the local press. Encouraging such opportunists to get licences and be environment friendly may be easier said than done.

GREEN GAUGE

Mr Gummer wants to know what we think of sustainable development. So let's start talking, says **Vicky Hutchings**

Few of you may have realised it, but the government is currently seeking your views about sustainable development. John Gummer wants "to hear views from local government, industry and business, academics, scientists, voluntary groups and individuals from all over the UK". So no let-out there: even the most humble among us can manage the status of "individual in the UK". Yes, your country needs YOU.

The launch of the consultation paper *UK Strategy for Sustainable Development* in late July sank almost without trace. Yet by the end of September, all views should be in and the government getting ready to present its report to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development by the end of the year. This is, after all, what John Major promised at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro last year.

Now what has always seemed obvious to me is that sustainable development, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Take the remarks by various transport ministers, made around the time of the green paper's launch. John MacGregor, Transport Secretary, insisted that: "To halt our present plans is to ignore the needs of industry, to ignore the right of every person to choose how to make a journey and to ignore the fact that, as living standards improve, there will inevitably be growth in road traffic."

And transport minister, Lord Caithness, has been no less robust in his views. "Road traffic growth is largely linked to economic growth. It would be unreasonable to set a ceiling on this," he told the House of Lords.

To the government, quite clearly, sustainable development doesn't mean cutting back on motorway building and car use, or promoting public transport. It probably doesn't mean a lot of things one might think it should. George Bush, fighting America's corner during the Earth Summit, for once didn't fudge the issue: the American lifestyle, he said, was not up for negotiation. Perhaps not quite so overt in its declarations of intent, the British government is playing according to the same rules. And so, to a greater or lesser degree, is every other industrialised nation.

Yet not all governments are quite so laid-back as Britain's. In Canada, Germany and the Netherlands, for example, public campaigns to explain and foster the concept of sustainable development are in progress. Here, there has been virtual silence.

From the other side, the definition of sustainable development is quite different. According to the authors of *Beyond the Limits* (the sequel to seventies bestseller, *Limits to Growth*), it means the end to a growth-obsessed world, but more important, to an end to inequality: "Such a world would have both the opportunity and the necessity to provide material security for all its people." A material security, however, that would mean the rich north cutting back on its never-ending consumption to allow the poor south to have a little more. Using resources more efficiently, recycling and developing less polluting industries are mere "technical fixes", say the authors, well enough in their way, and, indeed, "urgently needed . . . and will ease some pressures". "But they do nothing about the underlying causes of the pressures."

Few environmentalists have welcomed the paper. Fiona Reynolds, director of the Council for the Protection of Rural England, dismissed it as "schizophrenic", wryly noting: "The consultation paper contains welcome recognition of the need for fundamental long-term change. Yet unsustainable policies in transport, minerals, housing, agriculture, water and other areas grind relentlessly on. Will vision or inertia prevail in the end?" If you believe Friends of the Earth, the vision thing is the last thing on the government's mind. Andrew Lees, campaigns director, sees "the Treasury's fingerprints all over" the paper. "Instead of identifying targets and timetables for action, the government is giving precedence to unsustainable business-as-usual until beyond 2000."

Most greens, like nearly everyone, remained unconvinced by the government's insistence that it put VAT on household fuel this March to cut back Britain's carbon emissions—and put it down to the Treasury's simple desire for extra money. The public outcry, led by Labour, fuelled by the government's inept handling of the situation, left greens in something of a quandary. This was, after all, one of the measures they had themselves advocated, and for the same reason.

Yet, as the latest *Ends Report* ponders: "Perhaps the government should be asking itself whether the reaction would have been any different if it had taken the trouble to explain itself, and gone on doing so until the message had sunk home." Government and greens may never agree on what they mean by sustainable development. Yet, while so few people are actually discussing what it *does* mean, or finding out how they might have to change their lifestyle, one can only wait for a similar backlash to the VAT controversy to greet every step towards any kind of sustainable development.

An unedifying sight.

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THE GREAT OUTDOORS: A GOOD DEED IN A NAUGHTY WORLD

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We are looking for the appropriate message for Scrooge's Christmas card in John Minnion's delightful drawing.

Please send your suggestions to "Christmas Card Caption Competition", The Low Pay Unit, FREEPOST WD1630, London EC1B 1LP. All entries must be received by Friday, 3 September 1993.

The sender of the winning caption will receive a signed copy of Barbara Castle's recently published *autobiography, "Fighting All The Way".*

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The Guardian

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Sunday Times

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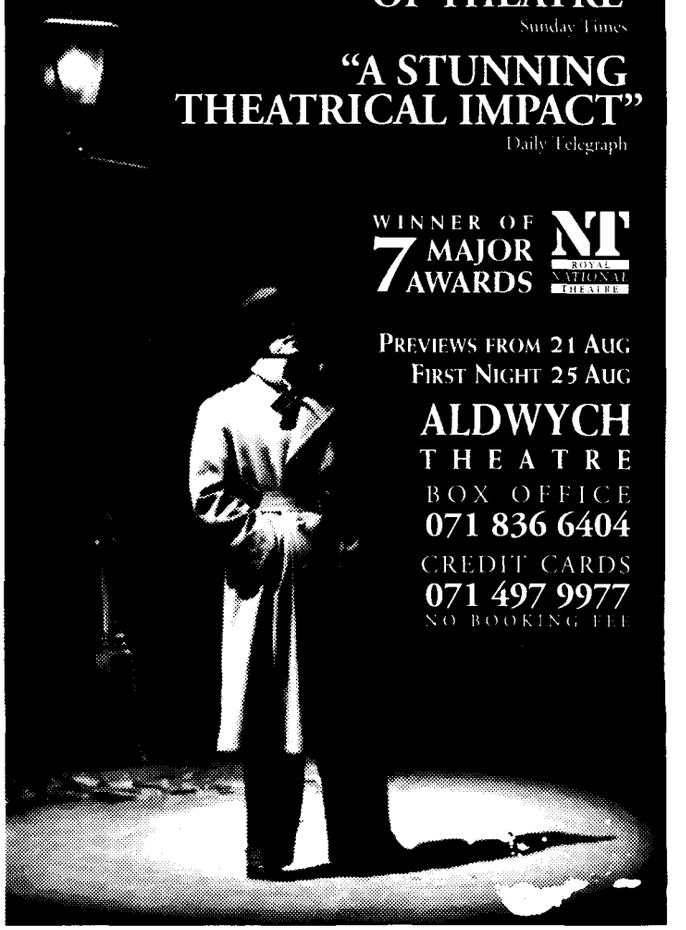

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Beyond the disco fever: picture from Mark Power's "Grief and Loss" series

Pictures of people affected by Aids used to target "them". Now, they portray "us". **Marina Benjamin** looks at the changing imagery of illness

A human condition

In the jargon of cinema, the term "turning point" is given to that moment in a film when its course takes a new direction. It is also the point at which everything that has preceded it is turned on its head. *Positive Lives: responses to HIV*, a photo-documentary exhibition mounted jointly by the Terrence Higgins Trust and Network Photographers to mark the tenth anniversary of the Trust, is just such a turning point.

What is being overturned is the hard-nosed philosophy of them and us, infected and non-infected. For much of the 1980s, this sanctioned the branding of people with Aids (PWAs) as social outcasts, pariahs in anti-social "risk groups": homosexuals, injecting drug users, prostitutes and the already unhealthy. This rigorous politics of exclusion relied on available signs of affliction—of degeneration written on the body—that both highlighted the symptoms of Aids-related illnesses and encoded the kind of response expected from the rest of us. Even the most self-consciously sympathetic media contributed to the monstrous birth of an iconography of victims, in which Kaposi's sarcoma became the distinguishing stigma of shame.

Time and again, Aids patients were presented to the world as isolated, gaunt, despairing—in fact, as melancholics, alone in the world and alone with their contamination. Dehumanised in medical images and always at a polite distance from medical practitioners, their appearance was at best that of a specimen and at worst a pollutant. However loudly liberals railed against unthinking calls for sectioning Aids patients, their portrayals shared this image repertoire, with its ethos of "look but don't touch". In these images lurked the implicit concept of quarantine.

As Susan Sontag and Sander Gilman have argued, such representations of illness gain currency whenever an affliction is construed as apocalyptic—capable of wiping out entire populations, signalling divine will to end civilisation as we know it, and promising new beginnings. The Bubonic plague, cholera and syphilis were each understood in these terms. As with representations of Aids and HIV, fear of contagion was expressed in paranoid verbal and visual languages that designated the diseases as "other".

Media fantasies on the otherness of Aids, although designed to quell anxieties, reveal all kinds of prejudices. All the self-righteousness of an Aesop fable surfaces in stories assuring us that, just as life need not be held to ransom by HIV if an individual steers clear of deviance, a community need not stay under siege if it can demonise the source of contamination as foreign.

This is where racial categories insidiously slip into Aids talk. In the US, Aids was first pictured as a Haitian disease, while in Europe, it was viewed as fundamentally American: a product of capitalist excesses and cultural libertinism translated into the body's geography as immoderate sexual appetite. Syphilis was similarly embroidered with allegories of otherness. Sebastian Brant, in *The Ship of Fools* (1494), labelled syphilis as a divine scourge for the collapse of a rigid feudal system, the rise of capitalism and the need to find New World territories to feed this hungry infant. Later, in the age of colonialism, syphilis was perceived as African.

Tackling such a cultural baggage is no mean feat, but *Positive Lives* scores well. The transformation of "victims of Aids" into "people with Aids"—a semiotic success of Aids activism—translates into visual codes that express egalitarianism, intimacy, caring and sharing, love and loss. They can be discerned in the chapters of the exhibition that deal with sexuality, religion, gay lives, grief and loss, Edinburgh's Muirhouse estate, children with HIV, prisons, buddies and hospital wards.

At every turn, the otherness of PWAs is denied. Photographs depict Aids patients in social contexts that are as intimate and as supportive as anyone else's. In Gideon Mendel's powerful series, "The Wards", doctors and patients are in dialogue, if not contact, sharing a joke or the experience of massage. Friends, lovers and parents are not only in the frame but involved in the action, expressing pain and concern, offering a loving embrace or help in administering a treatment.

This is not the first time that the pervasive them-and-us understanding of Aids has been challenged through art. Angrily radical activist organisations such as ACT UP in America and Stonewall in the UK have for some time been fighting the battle to establish an "inclusionist" attitude to Aids through gallery and

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billboard art that deploys the sloganeering imagery of advertising. At an ACT UP rally in New York in 1988, the film critic Vito Russo summed up the agenda of Aids activism, saying "Aids is a test of who we are as a people". We are all implicated.

What has changed between 1988 and now is that we are all implicated no longer merely through a sense of political commitment, social responsibility or personal experience, but in actuality. Because the relationship between us and HIV has changed. People with Aids are living longer; conventional and alternative medical treatments and self-help practices combine to prolong the lives of the ill.

No one knows how many people are HIV positive, no one knows how long someone can live with HIV before getting Aids, no one is even sure whether testing positive for antibodies is a certain indication of infection, no one can be sure that when someone says they practice safe sex, they do. Aids has become indeterminate: a sliding scale that undermines "infected" and "non-infected" as watertight categories.

Denis Doran's pictures in black and white—the way we like to see things, as it were—address this growing invisibility of HIV. His close-up portraits of people whose HIV status is undisclosed use image and text to challenge the viewer to a dual of judgment. The assortment of wacky individuals in the series "Sex", some into nose rings, some into leather, have one thing in common: they all practise safe sex. Next to them hangs a portrait of an ordinary suburban heterosexual couple; they don't use condoms, they take risks. Who do you stigmatise once the body-map becomes illegible?

It's only right that, as the epidemic enters its second decade, the focus of public attention on symptomology and death should give way to the struggles and successes of living with Aids—the business of survival, however curtailed. As Winston, the gay, transvestite, HIV-positive night clubber in Barry Lewis' photographs, says: "What's the point of dying if you haven't lived."

Aids is in the process of being assimilated. It is changing from a catastrophe of nature, a divine cataclysm, plague or scourge, into just another illness. New metaphoric understandings and rhetorical postures are already sprouting around it. The burden of stigmatisation has to some degree been lifted from the shoulders of outsider groups and transferred to a non-discriminating virus.

The danger lies in letting the pendulum swing too far the other way. If the sick fringe of a stable society is transformed into heroic martyrs of a sick society, individual suffering is liable to drop out of the picture. And as the spectre of sexual selectivity falls away from Aids, the disease increasingly lends itself to sentimentalised representations of death and dying. Like consumptives in the 19th century, PWAs may well find their personal experience pressed into the service of romantic myth-making.

"Positive Lives: responses to HIV", to 18 September at the Photographer's Gallery

Left: Atossa, Queen of Persia, watches the "magnetic" Messenger

Angus Calder on the difficulties Mom and Pop have with Saddam

Just a nasty kid

Early in what might be called "the last movement" of Peter Sellars' extraordinary *Persians*, sections of the Edinburgh Festival first-night audience began to laugh.

What they had seen was grim: enactment in words, mime and dance of the destruction of Iraqi forces in the Gulf war. Now Xerxes, a figure borrowed from a very old play (the oldest surviving European drama) in order to represent Saddam Hussein, had made his way back through the dead and dying to his court. He was wearing soiled battle dress. His mother urged him to go and change his clothes.

Up in the Grand Circle (probably not the best part of the Lyceum from which to view the production), I reacted to the audience's laughter three ways in succession. First, I was dismayed: the spell that Sellars' remarkably skilful company had worked to cast had been violated. Then I remembered how Africans laugh during tragic plays and how this reaction can be justified. Shakespeare's groundlings may well have hooted at Ophelia's madness, and thousands of Ancient Greeks, enjoying high festival, quite conceivably rocked with hilarity when Oedipus came back blind. But my third thought was that others were disconcerted, as I was, by the play's switch of mode.

Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey* is invoked by Sellars himself in the programme. That is a very great tragic drama. Unfortunately, Robert Auletta, who scripted *Persians*, isn't O'Neill. The pup Xerxes, splendidly played though he is by John Ortiz, irresistibly suggests a bad boy in some soap opera. His Mom, Atossa, has already accused the ghost of Pop, aka Darius, of denying him affection. Now look how he's turned out! Destructive, callous—delinquent . . . What have we done to our young people in America?

Sellars, setting up the first version of his *Persians* in an aircraft hangar in Salzburg, was allured by Aeschylus' daring in presenting to the Athenians in 472 BC—just eight years after the battle of Salamis—the grief of the defeated Asian enemy. He is a very intelligent man. He has read Edward Said and J D Bernal's *Black Athena* (which argues that the culture of the Greeks, as they said themselves, derived from Africa). Aeschylus' play is the first projection that we have of the non-European Other, the "Orient", which defines the "West" by its difference, and so is the first attempt that we know of to insist, across a constructed "racial" divide, that "they, too, are human".

Sellars is honestly committed. He was properly outraged by US media coverage of the Gulf war that excluded Iraqis, dead or alive. He sees theatre as "a kind of alternative public information system . . . able partially to humanise the denatured results of our vaunted and costly objectivity . . . television permits you to be spectator, but theatre makes you a participant."

But then, we, the participants, laugh out of turn. I do not blame the Edinburgh audience. Their laughter served to expose the fact that, in setting out to denounce the arrogance of the US superpower, to confirm, with a "multicultural" cast, the human stature of the Other, Sellars has Americanised both Aeschylus' Persians and contemporary Iraq. A drama presenting the defeat of one cultural system by another is adapted as the text for a sermon about how parents need to get closer to their children, to this younger generation, whose presumed nihilism clearly obsesses Sellars.

The "gulf" between young and old is not a trivial issue. Indeed, the ancient Greeks had quite a lot to say about it, and *King Lear*, even more than *Long Day's Journey*, is the cardinal text in our tradition that deals with it.

Aeschylus' text gives Sellars and Auletta their cue. Darius ruled the world, and "all called him king". His ghost denounces Xerxes: "He's raw . . . No mind for what I taught him." But, like everything else in the Greek, this primal tragic situation is contorted by Sellars' adaption. If Xerxes is Saddam Hussein, the Other whom we must understand and not demonise, who, then, is the Other's father? Darius, memorably played by Howie Seago, a deaf actor, is Pop, O'Neill Pop, Soap Pop, American Pop. The Other is America's bad son. But Iraq was, in fact, part of the British Empire, not a great world power, when

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Saddam was a nasty kid. There was no Iraqi Darius.

Mom (a Puerto Rican, Cordelia Gonzalez, is hauntingly fine as Atossa) could have been, as in Aeschylus' script, the emblem of majestic, resigned, cultural continuity. Through her, Persia survives. In the Greek drama, Atossa does not confront Xerxes after she has left the stage to find fresh royal robes for her son, who has returned from the war in rags. But in Sellars' version, she is a sad old rich girl who's depended on men all her life and whose final embrace of Xerxes, after a family row, represents only the continuity of mutual psychological parasitism. The range of reference that her part evokes includes not only Jackie Kennedy, but Imelda Marcos; Atossa's bad dream of two sisters, one dressed in Persian style, one in Greek, in which the latter refuses to be yoked to Xerxes' chariot, is transferred to a fashion show.

And of course such audacity is compelling. Sellars' *Persians* is full of wonderful theatrical skills. The transfer of much of the chorus, all Darius's speeches, and fierce military sound-effects, to loudspeakers thickly spread under the Lyceum's seats works very powerfully. The use of mikes attacked to the chorus of two is a thrilling substitute for Greek tragic masks, and it is impossible to praise too highly the majestic speaking of an African-American, Ben Halley Jr and a Palestinian-American, Joseph Haj. The music provided live by a Nubian lute player, Hamza El Din, is fresh and sharp. Best of all, Martinus Miroto, trained in the Javanese tradition of court dance, who performs wordlessly the role of Messenger, expresses with magnetic finesse the sufferings of unknown soldiers.

But this "multiculturalism", however splendid its incidental results, poses further ethical and political problems. Not just the Iraqi Other, but all conceivable Others are melted into Sellars' new world pot. Compared to Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata*, the absence of condescension is commendable. But if one contrasts the electrifying Ninigawa *Macbeth* and *Medea* seen in Edinburgh a few years back, the Japanese appropriation of European classics bridged cultures by artistic means, but left both east and west intact: Sellars' version of humanity hamburgerises every kebab it touches.

In the US, this production might work valuably with its natural audience. No resident of that country has ever cowered, at home, in an air-raid shelter; British audiences still contain people who, like myself, were actually "bombed out", and remembered that when we heard of missiles striking Baghdad. Sellars, for us, is laying on the evocation of life under bombardment unnecessarily thick (though it is masterfully done, with a handheld lamp, searchlight and hurricane lamp in one, moving around the ruins as the ghost of Darius and his widow express their horror). In America, perhaps, this piling of Pelion on Ossa is necessary. And I must stress that Sellars' *Persians*, whatever embarrassment it caused me, is ambitious, intelligent, deeply serious theatre, not just a show; it's something important.

Jonathan Romney zooms in on cinema's new obsession with video

We've been framed

Sliver may be among the most accurately titled films ever. It's that slender, unlike Joe Eszterhas' payment as screenwriter, which is more like *Chunk*. In conventional terms, it has little to recommend it except two items touted as high-concept selling points—a song by UB40 at their whiniest, and the antiseptic spectacle of Sharon Stone enjoying a solitary writhe in the bath (surprisingly, Badedas has missed the obvious product placement opportunity).

What *Sliver* (on release from 3 September) does have going for it, albeit fleetingly, is an interesting take on the theme of the moment—video surveillance. Since there's precious little suspense in the film, it won't hurt to reveal (besides, you'll have guessed as much from the UB40 video) that *Sliver* features a character who surveys the tenants in an apartment block by means of a massive bank of surveillance monitors. This gives us the chance to watch unsuspecting subjects at work, rest and play, usually in front of the bathroom mirror that conceals the camera. People yawn, screw, fight and drop all formalities—there's even an unflattering glimpse of director Phillip Noyce mugging blearily through his morning toilet.

The video premise provides more interesting dividends than you're at first led to expect. At first, we're offered a rather hackneyed tease in the film's self-conscious appeal to the supposedly perverse drives that link cinema and voyeurism. As one character says, and the film's poster reiterates, "You like to watch, don't you?" But there's nothing particularly pleasurable in the watching we get to do—the quick-spliced, decomposed images in the bathtime scene, and later some (implausibly giggly) Manhattan sophisticates peering through a telescope at a couple making love in the apartment opposite.

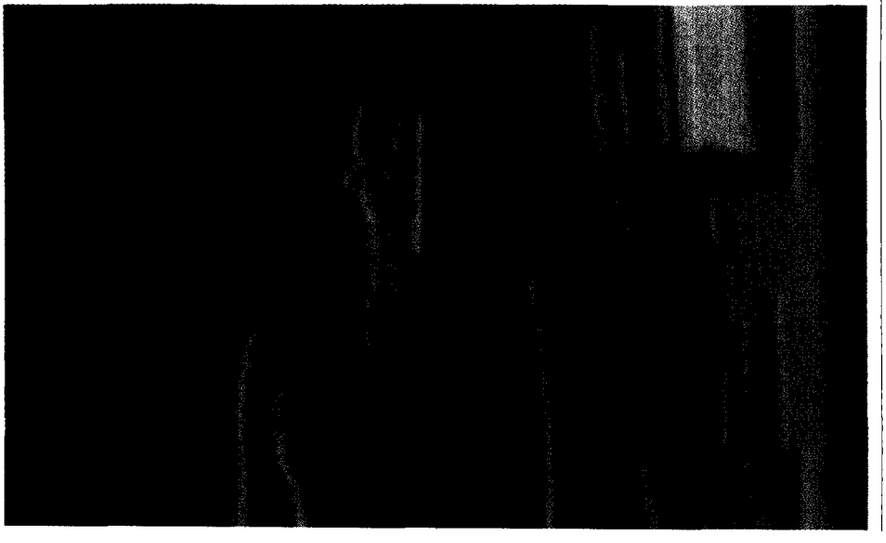
The first—inadvertent—revelation that *Sliver* offers is that the simple act of watching is no big deal after all. Over the past decade, voyeurism has been built so solidly into the margins of mainstream cinema—from *Blue Velvet* to *sex, lies and videotape*—that it no longer creates any frisson. In this sense, *Sliver* is as inept at getting a charge out of its supposedly fail-safe risquéness as was the dreary Madonna vehicle, *Body of Evidence*.

What *Sliver* does have to offer, in one remarkably powerful sequence, is an *excess* of vision. As Stone first walks in to find 50 screens simultaneously pumping out the realest form of "reality programming" imaginable, the camera wildly scans the screens, on all of which *something is happening*: some minor horror or spectacle or inconsequential moment charged with absolute significance for the split second that you notice it. As the throb of the soundtrack music joins in, the effect is an overwhelming appeal to cerebral overload: a high-power narcotic.

That moment is over all too briefly, but it's followed by a sobering one. The drunkenness that Stone's character Carly derives from the simultaneous availability of so much apparently raw knowledge palls when she realises that knowledge also carries a moral imperative. A man in one apartment has been sexually abusing his daughter, and there's a chilling exchange of glances when Stone gets in the lift with them. Suddenly, the father's shield of normality becomes charged with evasive intent, while the child's "innocent" look becomes a direct appeal to Carly.

There's no real debate on "improper" knowledge here. The issue is brushed aside, and the film effectively stops here. But for a moment, *Sliver* has transcended its glossy surfaces and taken stock of its implications as

Eye am a camera: "Benny's Video" shoots to kill



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a vehicle for the image. You're reminded how very problematic things get when film tries to engage with video.

These days, film increasingly measures itself against video as an instrument for capturing and/or manipulating the real. It's hard always to know what's at stake—whether film is threatened by video's access to the real, or envies its ability to reshape actuality. This is no longer a specialist subject restricted to the phenomenological wranglings of Wim Wenders or the moral debate of *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*. Mainstream fiction now routinely has recourse to camcorder imagery: everything from *Trespass*, for enhanced grittiness, to *Falling Down*, which captured the way that people use video as a lifeline to images of stability.

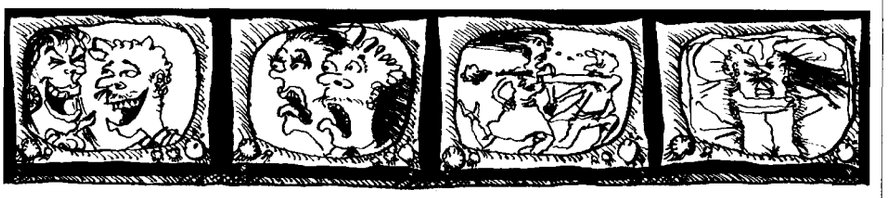
The most illuminating glimpses of cinema's uneasy relation to video are often the least fully articulated, rather than the more elaborate analyses offered by a film such as Michael Haneke's *Benny's Video* (at the ICA Cinema from 27 August). This Austrian production is a European art film of the most austere tradition: a blankly recounted parable about video's ill effects. An emotionally blinkered adolescent, who lives only for his electronic images, kills a girl, incidentally capturing her death on his camcorder, and then transfers his guilt to his vacant middle-class parents. It's a stern jeremiad about cultural devaluation, about the sins of the parents manifesting themselves in the children, and about moral anaesthesia in the new Europe.

But the film is without real impact. That's partly because it occupies such familiar territory. Its more obviously shocking content has been pre-empted by *Henry* and the Belgian *Man Bites Dog*, both wittier and more perversely charming in their blackness. But it also disappoints because there's no ambivalence, no sense that the film, despite its loathing of video, might be susceptible to some of the form's seductions. Instead, its disdainfully moralistic view is delivered strictly from the high ground—not least aesthetically, in its long takes from a static camera and absolute refusal of spectacle.

Benny's Video is part of a trilogy that Haneke describes as a "polemical statement about the American sensational cinema". Clearly, *Sliver* is exactly the sort of film that Haneke rails against. Yet, for all its idiot glossiness, *Sliver* does provide much more of a sense of video's seduction. The film's monitor scene, with its masses of casual domestic images, offers the appeal of a kind of random, on-tap reality: not filmed with intent but caught *on the hop*, plucked out of the real.

In the last year, we've come to believe more and more in video's capacity to "pluck" random moments and extract the truth from them—to identify, for example, the blurry figures seen with murder victims Jamie Bulger and Emmanuel Spiteri. Rather than making statements about the danger of the image, as *Benny's Video* does, there seems more mileage in the occasional reminder that our appetite for video-reality is motivated as much by a taste for the glamour of "reality programming" as by a desire for "truth".

JACI STEPHEN



Classic FM has dropped to a lower stave, but Dudley Moore can still sell Mozart to the masses

Whenever the phrase "bring it to a wider popular audience" is mentioned in broadcasting, it generally means downgrading the product so that the "plebs" will understand it. Heaven forbid that the plebs could be expected to understand and take pleasure in anything in its pure form. They are considered to have a low concentration span, a limited vocabulary, and are apparently incapable of enjoying anything that isn't broken up by gameshow-type antics or wild visual techniques.

When Classic FM first hit the airwaves, it was different. True, it was greeted with disdain from the elitists, but the "plebs" tuned in in their millions and still do. They weren't patronised or made to feel like cultural outcasts, and the station didn't have to plummet downmarket to attract this audience. The belief that great music could and should be enjoyed by as many people as possible seemed entirely logical.

Yet since the producers have been given a substantial bite of the cherry, they want more. Disappointingly, they are going downmarket to achieve it. In the daytime shows, the music now seems to be little more than a space filler between the commercials (British Gas, Kleenex, insurance), requests, quizzes, interviews and (I've never come to terms with this one) horse-racing tips. You may not have to move downmarket to bring classical music to a *wider* audience, but it seems you do if you want to bring it to the *widest*.

Back on television, the elitists jammed the Channel 4 switchboard when *Orchestra!* was broadcast. It featured Dudley Moore in conversation with George Solti, and again aimed to bring classical music to a popular audience by concentrating on the visual qualities of orchestral performance. *Concerto!*, which began on Sunday on C4, is another series of six hour-long documentaries from Initial Film and Television. It aims to do the same for six concertos. This time, however, Moore is joined by Michael Tilson Thomas, the eagle-like principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, which is also featured.

The first programme brought together James Galway and the Spanish harpist Marisa Robles to discuss and perform Mozart's *Concerto for Flute and Harp*. I've always spoken of Mr Galway in the same breath as the pianist Richard Clayderman. He seemed to belong to that breed of rent-a-musician who turned up on things such as *Des O'Connor Tonight* in the Honestly-we're-a-classy-show spot. Mr Clayderman would simper throughout his performance, barely moving his head for fear of disturbing his perfect blonde page-boy cut. He'd play "Theme From *The Godfather*" and "Theme From *Love Story*", which would then turn up on records with titles such as Richard Clayderman Plays Your Favourite Theme Tunes. You wanted to shoot him.

Mr Galway was the one wheeled in to play "Annie's Song". Did he ever play anything else? Could he play anything else? *Concerto!* was a revelation. He and Robles have been playing the flute and harp concerto together for 30 years, and they make a great pair both as musicians and personalities. Tilson Thomas nevertheless saw room for change. "Michael, we're not gonna change," said Galway. "We've been doing it like this for 30 years. We'd have to see a psychiatrist for a month."

"Think of me as a marriage counsellor," said the conductor. Robles is the kind of character that *Eldorado* never quite managed to find. Passionate about her instrument and Mozart, she explained to Moore that anyone can play the harp "eef you start ze 'arp when you are few dayss old and practeese teel you die". Mozart, she says, "woss a geniuss. Everbody knowss zat an' eef zey don't zey are eediots."

Concerto! doesn't dilute the music to make it more palatable. It features great stars who give fine performances, and Moore's role as interested buffoon has the effect of making the technical information as enjoyable as the concertos themselves. "Mozart writes *forte* here," says Tilson Thomas at one point. "What he means is 'sink in'." "Why didn't he write 'sink in', then?" asks Moore.

Television's other great cultural duo, Ken Barlow (William Roache) and Raquel Wolstenhulme (Sarah Lancashire) are deep into the French lessons of *Coronation Street* (ITV). I can't remember if Ken teaches French or geography at Weatherfield Comprehensive, but for the sake of his pupils let's hope it's the latter.

The man has about as much grasp of the language as Raquel does of the theory of relativity. Somebody please tell him that "francs" is not pronounced "fronk", and that all French nouns need prefixes of one sort or another.

The relationship nevertheless looks firmly set on its Pygmalion path. Can we soon expect the cries of Ken's "By George, I think she's got it!" echoing along the Street? And how long before Ken asks her is she'll oblige him with a *soufflé travaillé?* It would certainly be an improvement on Betty's hotpot.

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Citizens' charters

A WRITTEN CONSTITUTION FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM
Institute for Public Policy Research
Mansell, £40
REPUBLIC
Plato (translated by Robin Waterfield)
Oxford University Press, £17.95

Stephen Howe

The arguments against Britain adopting a written constitution have been few, thin, and repetitive. They mostly reduce to variants on the old saws that "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" and "If I wanted to go there, I wouldn't start from here at all". The first asserts that existing constitutional arrangements have served us well, and that there is no great demand for change. It begs the question of who "we" are to have been so favoured. They are more likely to be members of governing elites than ordinary citizens. Others think that, if the machine ain't broke, it's certainly decrepit, and neither the accelerator nor the brakes look very reliable.

The second objection is flimsier still. Its usual form is the assertion that because our system is based on absolute parliamentary sovereignty, entrenchment of any particular legislation is simply impossible. Inherited arrangements are thus given the authority of an unbreachable enclosure. A value-laden preference for sustaining the status quo (or rather, a historically inaccurate depiction of it) masquerades as a statement of constitutional fact.

There is, though, a more fundamental and interesting line of objection to constitution-mongering than these. It suggests that trying to frame comprehensive, permanent ground-rules for a society is a doomed and hubristic exercise. What we need are not overarching formal principles, least of all ones reliant on abstract declarations of rights, but the accumulated wisdom of small, incremental, pragmatic measures. The British constitutional tradition, gradually developed over centuries and allowing us to adapt whenever it appears necessary, enshrines this wisdom. To replace it with entrenched structures would produce results at best inflexible, at worst tyrannical.

It's an argument that, at least in outward form, very much resembles Karl Popper's famous barrage of obloquy against the "totalitarian" Plato. For Popper, Plato's *Republic* founded the tradition of arrogantly utopian social projects, leading inevitably to closed, dictatorial societies. If, as is suggested, rigid constitutionalism produces similar results, then it is oddly appropriate that a new translation of Plato should appear simultaneously with the most ambitious attempt to plan a new British constitution.

There is little hint of any of this, however, in Robin Waterfield's edition of the *Republic*. He writes as if arguments over Plato's politics were a peculiarly 1930s preoccupation, now long forgotten. But then Waterfield doesn't, in fact, think the book really has much to do with politics in the first place. It should instead be read, he says, as a discourse on individual morality and psychology. Its ostensibly political themes ought to be seen as just one huge extended metaphor.

Showing the flag: picture from "Vanley Burke: a retrospective", which selects images from the photographer's 30-year study of Black British life (Lawrence & Wishart, £14.99)

Waterfield's main sanction for this suggestion is that he believes the Greek word *dikaiosune*, which is perhaps Plato's most important concept and which is usually translated as "justice", should in fact be rendered as "virtue". It is thus transformed from a public, political idea to a private, ethical one. I cannot judge how much justice (or virtue) there is in Waterfield's revision; but it's certainly at odds with almost all commentary on Plato, and even a passing acquaintance with classical republican thought might make one doubt whether "virtue" itself was quite such an inward, individualistic idea as Waterfield makes it sound.

In other ways, though, his version of Plato is immensely pleasing. It's vigorous and dramatic, mercifully free from the tedious kind of dated pseudo-colloquialism that, in some translations, makes Socrates and Glaucon sound as though they were ruminating over port in the Senior Common Room.

Scepticism about grand political blueprints has other and newer twists than the Popper-on-Plato version. It's now widely suggested that written constitutions and bills of rights belong to a dying age: that of universalist claims, with their discredited idea of providing unitary, stable foundations for our myriad political projects. They amount to no more than what some cultural critics sneeringly call "rights talk", identifying it as just another verbal game with no primacy over any other way of talking.

Thus a range of avant-garde opinion, especially and ironically on what calls itself the left, has appeared to vacate the ground of argument over legal rights and structures. Identity, group tradition (always, of course, invented tradition) and culture completely swamp ideals of democracy and law. The very concept of citizenship is derided as virtually totalitarian in its supposedly homogenising implications. One prominent Irish cultural theorist recently described it as "a form of ethnocide".

In fact, both Popperian and postmodernist arguments against constitutionalism are ludicrous cases of mistaken identity. There is nothing about the possession of a written constitution and assertion of universal citizen rights that in itself makes a society more "closed" in Popper's sense, or which denies individual or group differences. The only form of closure common to almost all democratic constitutions is that some kinds of change are made more difficult than others by delaying mechanisms: requirements for referenda or for more than simple legislative majorities.

Thus if, by democracy, we mean simply majority rule, constitutionalism necessarily limits it. But these limits are self-imposed and freely chosen. They are drawn in the belief that the majoritarian principle is not the only one we should value. Others, such as individual and minority rights, should at times take precedence. Far from limiting the openness of society, such restrictions safeguard it. Quite often, as in the US of the Civil Rights era, judicial reinterpretation of constitutional provisions has served as an engine of social change rather than a barrier against it.

If constitutional entrenchment of practices or values can potentially be a kind of dictatorship of the past over the present, then who can doubt that Britain's archaic institutions and unwritten rules have created a more formidable, because more shadowy, type of this dictatorship? The "flexibility" of which constitutional conservatives boast has operated mostly to provide room for the state to defend itself against scrutiny or accountability.

The Institute for Public Policy Research document is certainly "foundational" in that the Constitution becomes the sole source of public authority, sweeping away tradition and common law precedent by which doctrines of royal prerogative, parliamentary sovereignty and ministerial responsibility were validated. In many other respects, from electoral reform

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to decentralisation, it is a genuinely radical set of proposals.

Yet, if anything, the main problem with the IPPR constitutution lies in the opposite direction from that implied by the whole Plato-to-Popper argument. It is, one might suggest, insufficiently foundational, too heavily premised on the question: "How can we get from where we are now to something better with minimum disturbance?"

In some respects, it's a relatively conservative document. Britain is to remain a monarchy. There is to be devolved power in Scotland and, to a lesser extent, Wales and the English regions. The UK will become a quasi-federal state. But sovereignty remains firmly in London. This won't satisfy that portion of Scottish opinion that demands either complete independence or at least a *con*federal set-up in which ultimate sovereignty for Scotland rests in Scotland.

On the other hand, the bland reference to European Community law having effect in the UK does not begin to reflect the complexity of European integration. The IPPR's framework of assumptions is based on the existing United Kingdom, with only minimal adjustments for the challenges this shakily multinational entity faces both from above and below.

This remains the only fully worked-out proposal for a written British constitution yet offered. The Liberal Democrats, Tony Benn, Frank Vibert, Ferdinand Mount and others have forcefully argued the case for constitutional reform; but none has actually shown in detail what their proposed system would be. Charter 88 has deliberately chosen to argue on broad principles, rather than proposing a particular constitutional package. The IPPR's is a genuinely pioneering exercise. With it, James Cornford and his colleagues have in a quiet way accomplished one of the most valuable initiatives in modern British politics.

City on edge

STORIES AND RECOLLECTIONS
Umberto Saba (translated by Estelle Gilson)
Carcanet, £14.95
A DIFFERENT SEA
Claudio Magris (translated by M S Spurr)
Harvill, £12.99

Mark Thompson

Trieste has the reputation of being a "case", anomalous and eccentric in most respects. Built into a great port by Viennese capital, the city enjoyed a brief heyday before the collapse of the Habsburg empire. It has yet to find a secure economic role in Italy.

Politically, it has been traumatised by fascist persecution of Jews and Slovenes, occupation by Tito's partisans, cold-war limbo under Allied military government, and by the influx of terrorised Istrian and Dalmatian Italians. With both the cold war and Yugoslavia gone, the city is still prey to nationalist discord and liminal anxiety.

Hardly surprising, then, if generations of writers have been fascinated by their city's cultural golden age, before and after the first world war, when Trieste was the channel for currents of high modernism into Italy. Italo Svevo was the giant of this scene, yet not the most typical figure. That was Umberto Saba (1883-1957), the best of whose short prose has been lovingly, often perfectly translated by Estelle Gilson.

Personally, and in literary terms, Saba was distinctly a case. After a false start as a D'Annunzian bard, he looked around and within for themes. Hag-ridden by his unhappy childhood, he was treated by the national pioneer of Freudian analysis, to whom he then dedicated poems about his boyhood—a sort of *Life Studies* 30 years before Robert Lowell. Since his death he has been recognised as one of the language's great lyric poets.

More than the poetry, these pieces record a career that mirrors that of Trieste itself. The early stories about the Jewish community are superb, on a par with Isaac Bashevis Singer; their plots turn on family crisis, household rebellion, fear of poverty, all lit by shafts of duty and faith. Just as fine are the seven stories from 1912-13, including a very funny account of visiting Montenegro.

In later pieces, however, the narrative voice sounds querulous and winsome, straining for affection: a wounded voice, that dare not utter its deeper concerns. The postwar reflections come alive when fascism is the subject. Here's a note from February 1945: "After Napoleon each of us is a little better, if only because Napoleon once lived. After Maidaneck . . . " Was any writer quicker to glimpse the import of the extermination camps?

Involuted Trieste finds here its epitome, but also its brave subversion. Describing the antiquarian bookshop that he owned, Saba praised its "great merit": "During all the years of fascism, it was a refuge, sheltering me from loudspeakers." Saba's prose has this virtue; humane and presumptuously intimate, it takes your arm and tells tales like the genius of everybody's grandmother, deaf to all loudspeakers alike.

Trieste's currently best-known writer, Claudio Magris, admires Saba greatly. With *Danube* (1986), Magris joined the few European intellectuals with a keen following across the continent. He made his first reputation as a critic of central European literature; only latterly have his books addressed a wider readership. Whereas the criticism is abundant and associative, the fiction attains a distilled lucidity, disclosing a master of implication.

A Different Sea tells the story of Enrico Mreule, the great event in whose life was friendship with Carlo Michelstaedter, a real figure from the golden age. On completing his philosophical tract, *Persuasion and Rhetoric*, Carlo committed suicide in 1910, aged 23. Enrico had already left for Argentina, to escape conscription—or was it, as Carlo thought, an act of free authenticity?

Magris's irony is so refined that it vaporises, permeating the narrative. Enrico believes that Carlo ranks with Buddha and the Pre-Socratics; yet Carlo's credo is impossible to live by. Only the onset of senile dementia allows Enrico to exist without desires, with memory. What holds for vitalism may hold for other philosophies too, but Magris draws no conclusions. Iridescent with ideas and sensuous detail, *A Different Sea* triumphs, despite a translation that repeatedly betrays the subtle rhythms and diction of the original.

Mark Thompson's "A Paper House: the ending of Yugoslavia" is published by Vintage

Final arbiter

TELL THEM I'M ON MY WAY
Arnold Goodman
Chapmans, £20

Bernard Crick

Lord Goodman's last ambition is to be his own Boswell. My distrust of autobiography is unshakeable and my prejudices against the genre intense. So I am unpleasantly surprised to find that I've read every page of this one in bed for pleasure, a grove normally sacred to culture. It displaced the pile of novels and poetry. But I began, of course, more economically. The 400 pages are well indexed: "Wilson, Harold; and Marcia Williams".

According to Goodman, "I do not believe that at any time . . . was there any emotional relationship between Harold Wilson and Marcia Williams. I do believe, however, that he proceeded in considerable apprehension in his dealings with the lady; in fact, that he was plainly frightened of her because of her quick temper and also because he had for a number of reasons formed a most favourable view of her judgement."

The last phrase shows him a master of what, as a solicitor, he warned his clients about—innuendo, as when he recalls Nye Bevan in his last weeks: "He had the medical advice of Sir Daniel Davies, who had been physician to Lloyd George and indeed to a number of misguided dignitaries who were influenced by his great reputation. Davies brought a strange quality of Methodist Welsh revivalism to medicine which was unacceptable to me but highly acceptable to his fellow countryman." Goodman implies something stronger than "unacceptable", but that cautious word is merely self-deprecatory, a comic implication that he trusts his own judgment too much and no possible defamatory slur on the late Sir Daniel Davies' skill or sullen craft. The book is like that.

"Who he?", younger readers may well ask, vaguely picturing Fat Fixer, elite creep, Wilson crony, establishment caryatid, and Odd-Job to Labour's right-wing leaders. Such was the *Private Eye* image. It pursued him with imaginative libels about his sex life or lack of it—to its great cost.

Only the fatness was true: food figures

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Harold Wilson shows David Frost around 10 Downing Street in 1969. Note the tokens of authenticity: a Lowry on the wall, a Matchbox toy in hand. Frost's "An Autobiography; part one: from congregations to audiences" (HarperCollins, £20) offers 530 pages of blow-by-blow commentary on the great man's interviews. And this is the first instalment

greatly in the life of this abstainer from alcohol, tobacco, etc. Even more than Lionel, Lord Robbins, he was the Lord High Everything Else of our times. But he got there from a lower middle-class North London Jewish home by brains and good luck, part of which was to be articled to Harold Rubinstein.

Rubinstein was solicitor to many or most London publishers, and his brother Stanley loved music and dealt with musical rights. From them, Goodman got his cultural education and contacts, which were to make him an excellent chairman of the Arts Council as well as of the British Council; but also he learned from them not so much the art of litigation as of arbitration. There was a time when Rubinstein was virtually a one-man arbitration tribunal for leading publishers.

In the US, there are firms of specialised arbitrators: matrimonial, property rights and contracts, and industrial relations. Here, too many disputes go to court at great cost, although private fixing is not always in the public interest. Sometimes, Goodman was working for his firm; sometimes on his own (often without fees) from a sense of public duty or possibly self-importance (but "which of us can 'scape whipping?").

When he met Ian Smith in Salisbury on Wilson's behalf to try to resolve the Rhodesian crisis, he was acting privately, yet he didn't denounce at the time what he now trumpets: the ignorance of the Foreign Office about African opinion, Wilson's folly in instructing him not to talk to African leaders, and that sanctions were "a total fraud".

The arbiter cannot overrule his clients, and he can't win 'em all (as when he became chairman of the Newspaper Publishers' Association: his views on their greed and illiteracy are memorable). He must live to fight or fudge another day. Eunuchs can be useful. But his relations with Wilson cooled in the late 1960s, when Goodman publicly espoused the Biafran cause in the Nigerian civil war, in speeches in the Lords. Perhaps he overestimated his own influence, threatened to go public, and had his bluff called. And he clashed with Michael Foot over Labour's closed shop legislation for Fleet Street.

Foot accused him of being too willing to reach agreements of any kind. He admits "some validity" in this; "I prefer a bad agreement to a prolonged disagreement . . . there are a great many issues where principle is misguided or even hypocritical, and it is a fair accusation that I tend to suspect this more than most people." The author of *In Defence of Politics* (as compromise) grudgingly agrees. But there are limits.

In his preface, Goodman says that it may be a serious defect of character that "I entertain hostility to virtually nobody". He goes too far when he says, of Rupert Murdoch, that while "it would be silly to pretend that he has been a wholly beneficial influence", he regards him "as a man of absolute integrity and truthfulness". As in Boswell, there is an absolute emptiness of moral vision: simply great tolerance and a humane love of great *characters*—especially his entertaining and conceited self.

"Defending Politics: essays on politics and pluralism in honour of Bernard Crick" is published by British Academic Press

Cosmic con

MY FATHER'S GURU: A JOURNEY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY AND DISILLUSION
Jeffrey Masson
HarperCollins, £16.99

Mary Loudon

"If people wear masks," says Jeffrey Masson in the introduction to *My Father's Guru*, "unmasking seems to me a legitimate activity." I am inclined to agree with him, especially in this quite extraordinary case.

Jeffrey Masson's wealthy Jewish-American father, Jack, had a guru by the name of Paul Brunton, otherwise known as plain P.B. The two met in India in 1945 and were to remain thick as thieves on the Path to Truth until P.B.'s death more 20 years later. For much of Masson's childhood and adolescence P.B. lived with the family, and, as Masson points out, "It was not easy to have a guru in urban Los Angeles in 1946".

It sure as hell can't have been, for P.B. had some very strange ideas. First, he claimed to have come from Venus (sometimes he forgot, and said Sirius). You get the picture: this is no small-time fantasist. He called himself Doctor, though Masson later discovered he was nothing of the sort. For most of his life, he claimed to have studied philosophy at the Astral University. Yes, the Astral University.

A self-appointed guru, P.B. meditated daily for hours. He was a strict vegetarian who dieted inconsistently and obsessively (sometimes all fruits, sometimes all nuts, but never all fun); sometimes he fasted for days on end (41 days was the real winner) and he encouraged his disciples to do the same. Remarkably, they did, but then this man was only a few decades ahead of the Jane Fonda Workout.

All this dieting and fasting and meditating had a purpose. P.B. was on the Path to Truth, and if you were really lucky (and really wealthy and really male and really celibate) you might be invited to join him. One can perhaps sympathise with a five-year old Jeffrey falling for such fancy; what is disturbing is the readiness with which Jack and Diana Masson swallowed this rubbish whole. As Masson says, when his first doubts began to set in, as a teenager: "There was really nobody . . . to whom I could turn for an alternative view of the world."

Masson no longer has this excuse, so I would like to know why (except for the fact that it is very difficult to let go of childhood's dreams) he has so willingly let P.B. off the hook. After all, the more you read about P.B., the less there is to recommend him. His love of the Masson family, of which Masson still remains convinced, seems questionable; and his desire to control it palpable. The rivalry between Jack and his brother, Bernard, was steadily fuelled over the years by P.B., and Jack and Diana's marriage was grossly violated by P.B.'s insistence on No Sex.

P.B. was also a racist. He believed that low-caste Indians left an "auric deposit" on the food of high-caste Indians just by looking at it. Although it is pretty certain that his temporal origins were Jewish, he had a nose-job and encouraged Masson's parents to do the same. He believed that the Holocaust was the consequence of the deeds of the Jewish people: "They are visited by the consequences of their own making."

I find such theories morally repulsive, and his description of communists as "psychic vermin" was merely stupid. Yet Masson cites both as if they were no more than evidence of charming eccentricity.

Almost as hard to stomach is P.B.'s misogyny. Although P.B. married four times (his last wife was 35 years younger than he was), Masson says that he advocated celibacy, never displayed obvious emotion, and regarded women's intelligence as negligible. There are suggestions of latent homosexuality (like inviting the 13-year-old Jeffrey to have a bath with him) but he hated to be touched, insisting that he became entangled in someone else's bad aura when it happened. He clearly hated women and could handle only celibate men. He sounds vile to me.

Masson claims that P.B.'s hold over the family receded in the early 1960s, although that didn't stop Jack from moving his family, home and job to South America on the grounds that P.B. was convinced the world was going to end in 1962—with the excep-

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tion of Uruguay and Ecuador.

So what was it about this man? This is where the book—which is for the most part absolutely gripping—rather falters. There is no sense of P.B.'s personality or charisma. What is interesting and rather sad is that Masson is himself blind to his father's guru, but he cannot admit it. He says lamely towards the end of the book that: "Had P.B. been a complete fraud, at least one motive would have been financial enrichment." And this from a man whose father provided the scandalous P.B. with a lifetime of private income, houses and holidays. I rest my case.

Mary Loudon is the author of "Unveiled: Nuns Talking" (Chatto & Windus, £10.99)

Life studies

THE STONE DIARIES
Carol Shields
Fourth Estate, £12.99

Kathryn Hughes

That the Canadian writer Carol Shields was not published in this country until 1990 remains one of life's great mysteries. So, too, is her apparently alarming record of a new novel every year, until one remembers that earlier work such as *Mary Swann* and *Happenstance* originally appeared in its homeland in the 1980s, and was not available until Fourth Estate cunningly bagged the rights to Shields' work here.

Still, *The Stone Diaries* is brand new and as great a treat as any of her earlier novels. Like them, it is a miraculous meeting of intellectual rigour and imaginative flow. On the one hand, it's a sharp-as-tacks investigation into the limits of the autobiographical form; on the other, a novel of effortless pleasure and sensuality.

Daisy Goodwill, born in 1905, attempts intermittently to tell the story of a life remarkable only in its large tracts of ordinariness. For while she came into the world in unusual circumstances—her mother had no idea she was pregnant and promptly died the moment Daisy plopped out on to the kitchen floor—most of her life has been spent in the role of well-to-do Canadian matron.

Whole tracts of her life—as featureless as her native Manitoba landscape—appear to have been emptied of meaning so that, "[Daisy's] autobiography, if such a thing were imaginable, would be, if such a thing were ever to be written, an assemblage of dark voids and unbridgeable gaps".

And it is into those voids and gaps that Shields inserts her narrative, filling up the ruptures in Daisy's interior life with an account of the strange double-headed family (no mother, two fathers) that produced her. Throughout, Shields holds fast to the conceit that this is no novel, but rather a documentary account of an ordinary Canadian woman's life of the type that became so central to recuperative feminist history in the 1970s. For slap-bang in the middle of the book come eight shiny pages of photographs of Daisy's family, starting with her parents Cuyler and Mercy and ending with her grandchildren. Significantly, the only picture missing is that of Daisy herself.

All this sounds tiresomely tricksy, but it isn't. For while Shields' work is always grounded in a sophisticated understanding of current litcrit debates, it is never swamped by them. Instead, we have her wonderful prose, which manages to be abundant and particular at the same time. Those tiny interior moments that Daisy is unable to weave into her sense of herself are both refined and amplified by a narrative voice combining the hard edge of native limestone (hence the *Stone* diaries) and the richness of the flowers that flourish in Daisy's suburban garden.

At the end of the book, at the end of her life, Daisy's existence is reduced to a series of lists: her favourite books, her major illnesses, her still outstanding "Must Dos". The question posed is not simply whether such an unremarkable existence could or should be committed to the historical record. Rather, *The Stone Diaries* asks whether any life, no matter how rich or sparse, is capable of being known and understood, even by the person to whom it is supposed to have happened.

Gates of Eden

THE CROCODILE BIRD
Ruth Rendell
Hutchinson, £14.99

Julie Wheelwright

Ruth Rendell continues her fascination with the complex web of emotions that entangle mother-daughter relations in her latest psychological thriller, *The Crocodile Bird*. This is familiar Rendell territory, where maternal love is laced with ulterior motives, betrayal is writ large in every coupling and few escape retribution.

The beautiful Eve Beck works as an estate manager and housekeeper for her absent landlord and former lover, Jonathan Tobias. Eve spent an idyllic childhood on Shrove estate, where her mother worked at the big house for Jonathan's father. Her first bold venture beyond the valley to university on a scholarship, however, meets with shattering consequences and she returns with an illegitimate child.

Disillusioned, she vows to protect her daughter—whose father remains a mystery—from the corrupting influence of the world. Only a mute gardener, an assortment of delivery men and Jonathan, on brief visits home, ever disturb the peace. Eve provides her daughter with poetry and 19th-century novels but keeps her from other children and their parents because "most people are bad".

Liza soon learns that Shrove—a name suggestive of the absolution Eve seeks—is her mother's greatest love. After a storm devastates the estate, Eve wanders like Ophelia, mourning her "paradise lost". The ever-observant Liza notes: "That was when I began to get the feeling Shrove was more important to her than I was."

Soon the estate is littered with the bodies of unwelcome intruders whom Eve is compelled to dispatch to protect her Eden. At 17, after Liza has finally left Shrove just ahead of the police, her mother becomes immortalised as "the Peri outside the gates of Paradise". Superhuman Eve, who hid her murderous instinct under a charming appearance, is locked outside forever.

In another familiar Rendell device, this is a story within a story, as Liza nightly recites to her boyfriend, Sean, the events that lead to her abrupt departure from the gatehouse. It parallels a daughter's realisation that she must finally separate herself from the murderous, brilliant, beautiful mother who had controlled her life for so long.

"Yet now as she looked at her own face it was a youthful Eve that she saw, different from the Eve of the present, an Eve she had forgotten but who came to her as herself . . . she was a clone of that Eve, fatherless, her mother's double, her mother all over again."

Just as she circumvented Eve's dictates against learning about the outside world (Liza surreptitiously watches television at Shrove House) so she rejects her faith in the virtues of isolation. Launched into the world, Liza appreciates her mother's lessons about endurance but longs for "diplomas, families, relations". She struggles to balance her rage with empathy.

Rendell has, once again, dug deep into the psyche to unearth the traumas embedded in these fraught relationships. She has created a compelling drama, taut with suspense and sharp observation. Like the crocodile bird of the title, Rendell pecks calmly on the murderer's ground.

Unfair wages

INCOMPARABLE WORTH: PAY EQUITY MEETS THE MARKET
Steven E Rhoads
Cambridge University Press, £24.95

Michael Rubenstein

Apples, it is often said, cannot be compared with pears. Yet a dietician can tell us the respective vitamins, calories, fibre and energy these fruits provide. In the same way, jobs with different characteristics can be compared according to their skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions. This premise underlies both the management technique of job evaluation and the feminist concept of comparable worth, which in the European Community has been translated

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into a legal right to equal pay for work of equal value.

Although equal pay legislation has been in force since 1975, women in the UK still earn only 79 per cent of men's hourly earnings, excluding overtime. This does not mean that Jane gets 79 per cent of her colleague John's pay despite being employed on equally demanding work. Much of the differential is due to women working on less demanding jobs than men, usually in sex-segregated occupations and often in firms where there are no men employed on work which can form the basis for an equal-value comparison.

Channelling women into low-paid, female-dominated jobs does raise a sex discrimination issue; but the complaint relates to equal opportunities rather than equal pay. Thus it is illusory to imagine that if only equal pay law were enforced more effectively, women would earn, on average, as much as men. Equal pay is more a slogan than a programme.

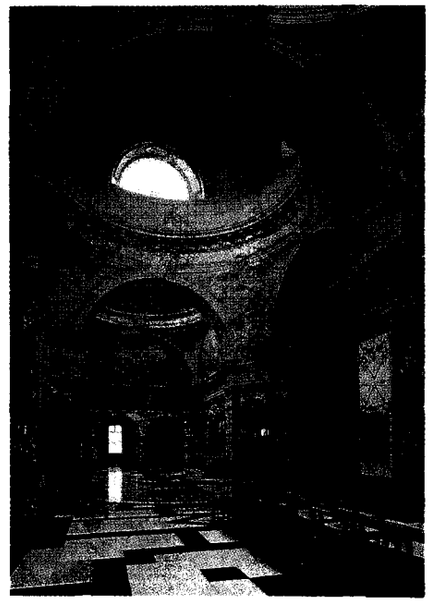
As a political economist, Steven Rhoads is quick to appreciate this. His stimulating and entertaining comparision of attempts to implement equal pay for work of equal value in the US, Australia and the UK scathingly exposes the economic illiteracy that can characterise the comparable worth debate, and the more sinister tendency of "equal value" proponents to presume that if female-dominated jobs receive lower ratings than men's work, there must be something wrong with the evaluation system.

However, what Rhoads fails to acknowledge is that there is also ample evidence that some part of the pay gap between women and men *is* due to discriminatory undervaluation by employers of work mainly done by women. Women's jobs can be paid less because they are performed by women. Rhoads sees equal value legislation as a futile attempt to establish the "worth" of dissimilar jobs. Correctly viewed, it is instead a legal framework for assessing whether there is sex discrimination in pay.

Comparing job demands is admittedly more subjective than comparing nutritional values, but it is a well-tried technique in wage determination. If an employer pays more to men for what is assessed as a less demanding job, that raises a case to answer under the law, in the same way as an employer who selects a less well-qualified man over a woman is required by law to offer a nondiscriminatory explanation.

Unequal pay for work of equal value is a species of sex discrimination. We prohibit sex discrimination in employment in all its guises—recruitment, promotion, dismissal, working conditions. Quite why we should leave a massive gap in the scope of protection against discrimination by not providing a remedy against proven pay discrimination is something opponents of comparable worth never satisfactorily explain.

Rhoads rejects comparable worth because he regards it as antithetical to the operation of the labour market. On his reasoning, if librarians think their pay is too low, they should retrain and become plumbers. Indeed, the US obsession with the market is such that



Precincts of justice: the Great Hall at the Old Bailey, pictured in "London Revealed" by John Freeman (Little, Brown, £14.99)

most comparable worth litigation there has focused on whether an employer should be obliged to adopt equal pay for jobs which the employer's own evaluation system has assessed as equally demanding. Precluding an employer from ignoring its own job evaluation has been on the statute books in the UK since 1970 and does not generate controversy, but the US courts have refused to "repeal the law of supply and demand" even when faced with such a glaring anomaly.

There is no doubt that our own equal value law has not worked well. Cases are too expensive to litigate and take too long to adjudicate. The absence of an effective remedy, particularly for workers in sectors formerly covered by Wages Council protection, forms the cornerstone of the complaint to be presented by the TUC to the European Commission this month. That will ask for infringement proceedings to be taken against the UK government on grounds that it is not in compliance with EC law.

It is arguable that equal pay for equal work as such has run its course. The focus now should be broader, to encompass discriminatory underevaluation of women's work. It is easy to point to problems with equal pay law, but the answer must lie in improving the procedure for securing pay equity, not in abandoning the right.

This is not a message that would play in Peoria, where Adam Smith still rules. In truth, despite a patina of sophisticated jargon, the level of debate in the US on this issue is both naive and incredibly insular. It is refreshing to have an American like Rhoads investigating whether his country has anything to learn from European experience, even if his conclusion is that it does not.

Michael Rubenstein is editor of "Industrial Relations Law Reports" and co-editor of "Equal Opportunities Review"

PRINTOUT

Class enemy

Boyd Tonkin

Two things I dislike about Old Etonians: 1) their crass mirth when they answer strangers who ask where they went to school with "Slough Comprehensive"; 2) their invariable pose as sensitive souls dragged screaming through a regime matched only by the Turkish jail in "Midnight Express". And now we can get on with a fair assessment of Paul Watkins' "Stand Before Your God: growing up to be a writer" (Faber & Faber, £14.99).

Although half of the prolific young novelist's account of his schooldays takes place there, this is not an orthodox addition to that crowded corner of English letters, the Eton memoir. So don't expect a variant of the "Georgian Boyhood" section in Cyril Connolly's "Enemies of promise", with its famous "theory of permanent adolescence" and easy assumption that Eton can act as a metonym for the English ruling class.

Watkins has a sadder, less overtly political story to tell. Son of a Welsh marine geologist who emigrated to Rhode Island, he endured four-year spells at the Dragon School in Oxford and at Eton. Did "some strange sense of revenge" cause father to plunge son into "the very core of what had stood against him"? Paul will never know, for Watkins senior died of cancer at 42. A fleet and supple prose explores the son's many estrangements. By parental whim, he's a hybrid and outsider; by fate, a bereaved teenager under grief's "skulking shadow"; by choice, a fledgling writer who travels "the river of untold stories".

Shards of the standard public-school critique lie scattered like shrapnel through these pages: Eton as the land that time forgot, with its crazy cults and "punishments for everything"; Eton as the scandal-ridden den of porn and drug-dealing; Eton as the trigger to lifelong indolence or wild revolt; Eton as a key that opens many doors but closes others ("down at the Globe pub in Fishguard", for instance).

In fact, Watkins neither failed nor rebelled. His views on the system and its mental legacy will surprise few readers. More *memorable is the evocation of growing up:* on the rugby field, in a Flanders cemetery, on the seas of New England. From these earthier versions of Joyce's epiphanies, the mind grows and the self learns to live apart.

This fragmentary life helps explain the bitter masculine ordeals in Watkins' novels; it also shows why, "impatient to be good at something", he published four in his twenties. What matters here—the fierce drama of adolescence, the secret ties of loss and creativity—would matter wherever its author was educated. But would an alumnus from a real Slough comprehensive end up between Faber's august covers?

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The sedge is wither'd from the lake,

And no birds sing.

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ENDGAMES: Weekend Competition

No 3290 Set by Russell Lucas
You were asked for songs from Andrew Lloyd-Webber's latest musical—about himself.

Report by Ms de Meaner
A popular comp, and only one unfortunate person, a W Dover, sent in song titles, instead of a song. I have to say I liked two on the list enormously: "Dough Ray Me" and "Midas Well Be Me". If Mr Lloyd-Webber ever gets to do this musical, I'm sure these would be crackers. George Cowley did a little better and sent in two lines: however, I'm not sure that brevity was ever one of Andrew's faults. Indeed, from all I've heard about the man, I'm convinced he would never begin any song (however short) with the words: "I may be fat and ugly . . . "

Another who drew my notice was * Barry Baldwin, who for some mysterious reason, always signs with an asterisk up front. His first two lines, "Wherever egos,/ I goes", promised much, but the inclusion of "wanker" (twice), "fart" (as in silly) and "twats" (again, as in silly) was really, well, rather *crude*. Tim Hopkins, meanwhile, sent in some extraordinary lines, seemingly under the impression I'd asked for Rolf Harris. I think his entry deserves to be quoted in its entirety: "I'm Drew the Smug,/ Lug-a-lug, lug-a-lug,/ With the ugly mug,/ lug-a-lug, lug-a-lug,/ And my tunes go/ Chug, chug, chug, chug, chug,/ And my shows I/ Plug, plug. plug, plug, plug,/ I'm Drew the Smug. " What can I say? Ten pounds to the winners (even Wendy Bradley who won with two), plus hon menshes for Noel Petty, M E Ault and D A Prince.

GRYPH'S QUIZ

The answers all have something in common

1. Maltese decoration
2. Silk
3. Convenience
4. That is
5. City
6. Military commander
7. Majority denomination
8. Previous era
9. Copies
10. From the beginning

Answers below

Quiz answers

All are abbreviations of the pattern "-c": 1) GC; 2) QC; 3) WC; 4) sc; 5) EC; 6) OC; 7) RC; 8) BC; 9) cc; 10) DC. Notes: 1: George Cross awarded to the island as a whole 1942; 4: Latin: scilicet; 10) Musical instruction: Da Capo

I don't write for you intellectuals,
The truth is you never rate me:
All through my lifetime,
My hard existence,
I've filled the theatres—
You kept your distance!

If I wrote for you intellectuals,
I'd be wasting my time on egg-heads:
You don't want music
Sweet and harmonic,
You like your tunes to
Be cacophonic.

And as for fortune and as for fame,
They are everything that they're cracked up to be:
They're not illusions—
They got me the women I wanted, you see,
To love and to make them love me.

So write me off fool intellectuals,
You think that my shelf-life is over:
Well let me tell you
I'm still producing
The stuff that you like
To be traducing!

Margaret Rogers

(Tune: Close Every Door To Me)
Close every score to me?
Hide all your books from me?
Pastiche and tribute
are really all right.
Postmodern irony's
my musicology
—if you like torch songs
you'll stay up all night.
If my work were important I
would ask it should never die
but I know by muzak
I'll conquer the world.
Close every score to me.
Keep all your books from me.
This tortured genius is never alone
For I know you will find
I've been reading your mind
And each catchy melody
Will never let you go.

(Tune: Love Changes Everything)
Money changes everything.
Ditch the old wife, hitch the new.
Money changes everything.
Buy a masterpiece, buy two.
Money makes the critics cry
And their wounding comments harmless.
Money changes everything.
How I tremble at the shame.
Musicology will never be the same.

Wendy Bradley

Just Like I Did!
A tune's a balloon with a string,
It's a simple and hummable thing—
Though its mind may be teeny!
Just grab hold of Puccini
And float off like Sinatra or Bing!
Plagiaristic and playful/but very decided!
And you can do it, just like I did!

Hold that string—with the music you'll soar
And you won't feel a heel any more!
Was I thick? Are you thicker?
I got richer much quicker
Than anyone else except Clore!
Critics and cleverdicks/smirked and derided.
Trade rags for riches, just like I did!

If I had a few wives on the way,
That must prove I'm no poove, and not gay—
Where the hostesses twitter
I amaze with my glitter,
It all shows how show business can pay!
My attention was always/quite undivided—
Keep your eye on the dollars, like I did!

Gavin Ewart

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I was just a baby-boomer with a feeble sense of humour
But a dab hand at a catchy serenade,
And the times were ripe for hustling, you could hear the banknotes rustling.
So with stories from the Bible I was made.

With the sixties down the plughole, I then catered for the lughole
Of the middle-brow, west-end-style music buff
Who thought nothing could be sweeter than the number from *Evita*,
And the money poured in, bundles of the stuff.

Next I made a canny beeline for the concept of the feline,
And on the back of that, *Starlight Express*.
Then the *Phantom* had them raving, like it satisfied the craving
For an old idea dolled up in fancy dress.

Yes, I kept the fans delighted, I was honoured—I was knighted!—
And my face is known from here to Mandalay.
And the secret of my glory, if you want to know the story,
Is: make a little go a long, long way.

Basil Ransome-Davies

Reflections
Scene: Andrew is standing on Tower Bridge, looking into audience. Behind him is the skyline of London at night. After previous scene's bust-up with Sarah, he is in unusually reflective mood. Chorus is upstage left. Andrew sings:

My darling Evita,
No one could sing sweeter,
No one could unseat her,
Chorus: Became a world-beater.

I did it with *Cats* too,
Though some called it cat spew—
Some elitist pratt's view!
Chorus: There's no doubting that's true.

I had to address fame,
Then *Starlight Express* came;
The poisonous press claim:
Chorus: Lloyd-Webber's a spent flame.

I showed 'em with *Phantom*
That I was no bantam;
(shouts): Rescued Sarah from serfdom
Chorus (sombre): Theatrical whoredom!

Press pack runs on to stage. There is a bustling and clicking of cameras as they approach Andrew. One reporter steps forward with microphone:

Reporter (spoken): Mr Lloyd-Webber, Mr Lloyd-Webber . . .
(sings): Why have you split up with Ms Brightman?
Andrew (spoken): Let me tell you, friend . . .
Stage lights dim, spotlight on Andrew
(sings, slowly): She just wasn't right, man.
Chorus, Andrew, Reporter, Press Pack (crescendo): She just wasn't right, man.

—Curtain: end of Act I

James Mortleman

No 3293 Set by Eric the Bird
Some time ago the *Independent* ran a piece of fiction of 500 words, everyone of which began with the letter "W". We are only asking you for 150 *and* you can choose any letter you like. The subject matter is also up to you. The result must, of course, scale the literary heights of which I know you are capable. Entries to be in by 2 September.

CROSSWORD

Crossword 1669
£5 book tokens for the first three correct solutions opened. Entries to Crossword 1669, New Statesman & Society, Foundation House, Perseverance Works, 38 Kingsland Road, London E2 8DQ, by Tuesday 31 August.

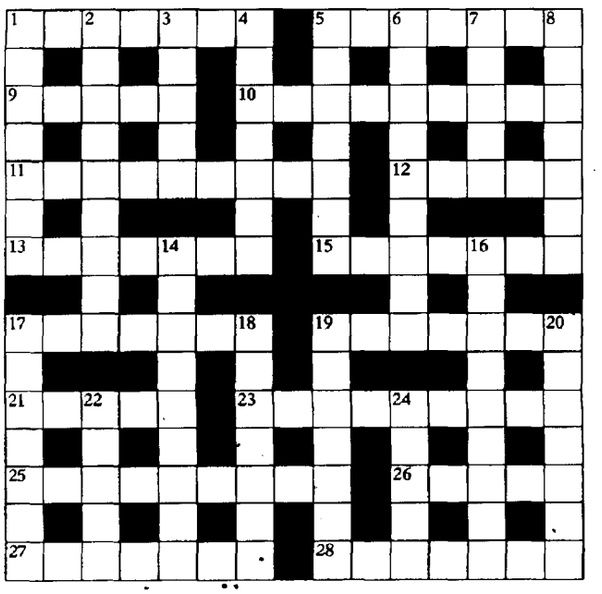
ACROSS
1. A faithful friend who has a number of enmities. (7)
5. It is tidiest to have a meal in the home. (7)
9. Furniture supplies half the dirt to the pantechnicon. (5)
10. To the river I disappear, hired out to an operatic hero. (9)
11. Ammunition given transport to the range. (9)
12. It being the most inferior, the editor left the material. (5)
13. University teachers holding a paper are intimidating creatures. (7)
15. Politician for whom no tears are shed. (7)
17. Told a tale about knowledge being compared. (7)
19. Animal which puts the grass back on its eggs. (7)
21. He stares open-mouthed, being a king without an imitator. (5)
23. Praised when goes wrongly without one into variety of duel. (9)
25. Sporting competition for a marriage drama? (9)
26. Replay concerned with a bit of cricket. (5)
27. Fish for one who takes a picture. (7)
28. Mocks the German before a fateful date. (7)

DOWN
1. Provided a quotation to give extra information about the leader. (7)
2. Bag in which drudge holds vice's companion. (9)
3. Course in which people are often organised badly. (5)
4. Great progress made by Turkey in its sports teams. (7)
5. She would be way out if she lost her head. (7)
6. Payment which is small included in the unstarted surplus. (9)
7. Take part in a race on even terms. (5)
8. Foot translated by animal. (7)
14. Possession puts an indefinite number into the manipulation of his power. (9)
16. It is valuable when the reliable are in step. (9)
17. Vegetables which leave something sticky in the dregs. (7)
18. The resident gives a penny to Sam. (7)
19. University backing in revolutionary broadcast. (7)
20. Parts of the country for sport? (7)
22. Bread for a kind of bird. (5)
24. Bull of one who departs without a run. (5)

Winners of 1667
N. Leggatt, Broadstairs
A. Cooper, Leamington Spa
J.E. Smith, London N10

Solution to 1667

P	A	L	A	D	I	N	■	T	U	M	B	L	E	R
R	■	I	■	U	■	A	■	A	■	A	■	Y	■	E
O	F	T	E	N	■	I	M	P	A	S	S	I	V	E
V	■	H	■	K	■	V	■	P	■	T	■	N	■	F
F	R	E	M	I	T	E	■	E	X	E	R	G	U	E
R	■	N	■	R	■	■	R	■	R	■	■	■	■	R
B	R	E	A	K	F	A	S	T	■	Y	E	A	R	S
■	■	S	■	■	■	D	I	■	■	■	■	S	■	■
C	O	S	T	S	■	V	I	T	A	L	I	S	E	D
O	■	■	■	A	■	A	■	■	■	A	■	Y	■	E
C	H	A	N	N	O	N	■	T	A	N	G	R	A	M
K	■	S	■	G	■	T	■	A	■	T	■	I	■	E
P	A	P	E	R	B	A	C	K	■	E	W	A	R	T
I	■	E	■	I	■	G	■	E	■	R	■	N	■	E
T	A	L	L	A	G	E	■	N	O	N	U	S	E	R



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BACKCHAT

Labour should forget about politics and concentrate on money, says **Mat Coward**

For the first time in history, it is reported, the Labour Party is in the black. This is indeed wondrous news, enough to lift the heart of even the most determinedly cynical ward activist, to bring a lump of pride to the throat of every slave-wage worker, locked-out picket, and all the other moaning dinosaurs who have been holding back the glorious march of modernisation.

But there is no reason why we should stop at merely being "in the black". Let us go boldly forward to a position of full-blown, dividend-paying profit! Frontbencher Derek Fatchett has the right idea; talking about small firms recently, he said: "This is potentially a very important market for Labour to tap." That's the spirit, Derek, and here are some more suggestions:

First, we must centralise operations to avoid the duplication inherent in maintaining hundreds of separate constituency outlets. The marketplace just isn't big enough to support thousands of individual branch secretaries, bank accounts, printing bills and so on.

Instead, we should concentrate resources on just one, centrally positioned warehouse, where, following suitable relocation arrangements, all party members would be reallocated to the Telephonic Credit Card Donation Solicitation department. (This programme is already under way in the south.)

Obviously, this would mean abandoning the party's traditional commitment to putting up candidates in council and parliamentary elections. Some shareholders may view this with alarm, but how much revenue do councillors and MPs actually attract, anyway? The answer is: not very much in fact, certainly not compared to mugs, T-shirts and baseball caps. While it's true that parliamentarians assist in raising the sector profile of the organisation, they do not always do so in an entirely helpful manner.

Next, we need to broaden our shareholding base. There has been much concern at head office that most of our repeat subscribers are drawn from a narrow social band. In tests, we discovered that investors who self-characterised their affiliations as Conservative, Liberal, Fascist, or Ulster Unionist were less likely to be interested in buying LabCo shares than were those who described themselves as Socialist. Not a lot less likely, as it turns out, but at least a little.

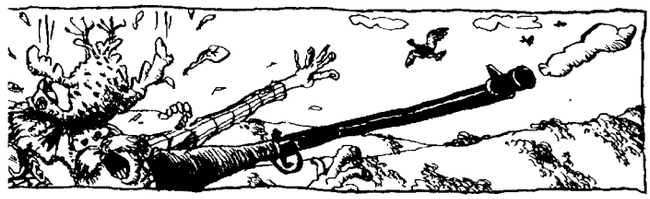
If, therefore, it is our political image that is proving off-putting, it seems only logical to remove this obstacle. We should be moving towards an aggressively apolitical stance on as many controversial issues as possible. (This programme is already well under way throughout the country.)

Campaigning has, in the past, been a misplaced priority, which, when seen in the context of profit-maximisation, is revealed as a largely wasteful activity, tending to attract votes rather than money. It absorbs energies that might better be expended in constructing and evaluating new and ever-more complicated subscription collection and cost-reduction methods.

We must finally face up to the fact that Labour's unsuccessful history is full of wasted opportunities, inadequate stock control and excessive ambition. Over-expansion has been at the centre of our failure, so that what could have been—if prudently run—a moderately lucrative, small-scale enterprise has run itself almost into the ground through reckless diversification.

But now that we are, at last, out of the red and into the black, we have a chance to begin again. Without the distractions of commercially irrelevant objectives. Without a costly, bottom-heavy corporate structure. As we have said all along, British participation in the ERM is certain to produce a consumer-led recovery—a recovery in which Labour is determined to play a major part!

FORTEANA



Small flying men, cannon balls, signals from ET. **Paul Sieveking** collects them all

As the torrent of stunning data pours into Fortean Towers, much is buried deep in the protean chaos of the archives, and is sadly lost to view, at least for the immediate future. One day, the project of putting everything on CD will get under way.

This week I will share a few, unrelated, period gems retrieved from oblivion in a recent random trawl.

One of the most powerful, and strangest, signals ever recorded in the search for extraterrestrial intelligence came when no one was there. At 10.16pm on 15 August 1977, the radio telescope at Ohio State University picked up a minute-long signal far stronger than anything ever picked up before. Researcher Jerry Ehman came across the signal next day when scanning the computer printouts. "Wow!" he scribbled in the margin.

According to Robert Dixon, head of the SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) programme: "It wasn't a spacecraft or an echo from a satellite. It was unmistakably of intelligent origin and had all the hallmarks of coming from an intelligent civilisation."

The transmission, known today as the "Wow signal", was recorded on a printout of microwave signals that show up as numbers. Typical signals from natural noise would come in as 1s and 2s. Anything over 5 was a strong signal; anything beyond 9, the computer switched to letters. The "Wow signal" registered as 6EQUJ5, way off the scale of what anyone at Ohio State had seen before—or since. (*USA Today*, 9 October 1992.)

Mrs Viola Johnson, an employee of the City Cleaners in Longview, Washington, saw something pretty odd at 3pm, on 8 April 1948. At first she thought they were gulls or else it was time to have her glasses changed, she told the *Longview Daily News* (9 April 1948). She was taking her afternoon rest when, out of nowhere, came three men, "just like grey, uniformed, minute men" flying towards the cleaning building. She rushed towards the nearest exit, telling the other employees to follow her. In the hubbub, the only one to make it to the door in time to catch a glimpse of the men with the strapped-on motors was janitor James Pittman. He said the gents didn't have wings. They headed back in the direction of Seattle. Their speed was described as "medium", and their altitude about 250 feet. There was a third, independent, witness.

"Not long ago", said the *Cataract Journal* (Niagara Falls) of 27 June 1903, reprinting a piece from the *Chicago Chronicle*, an old peasant was wandering in the jungle near Ahmadnagar in India, when he found a black metal ball. It looked like an iron cannon ball, but he was struck by its immense weight. He took it home and discovered, on scratching it, that it was made of solid gold. It weighed eight pounds and its sale made him a rich man.

There were many more of these cannon balls lying hidden or buried in the vicinity, and their story was a curious one. At the end of the 16th century, the great Mogul emperor Akbar called on Ahmadnagar to surrender. The opulent city was ruled by Princess Cande. Realising resistance was futile, she had all the gold and silver in the city melted down and cast into cannon balls, which were fired into the jungle. When Akbar entered the city, he found the treasury totally empty.

Here's a recent item from Zimbabwe's *Harare Herald* (22 August 1992). Lawmakers in Nigeria's Edo State were sitting on spartan utility chairs instead of the usual plush seats, which had been banished to the press gallery of the Benin city legislative chamber under suspicion of witchcraft. It was not clear who had triggered the juju scare in the chamber, where the speaker, his deputy and the majority leader had all been removed the previous week after a political row. It was planned to invite a juju man to "cleanse" the chamber.

Paul Sieveking is editor of "Fortean Times"

Felix Bennett

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THIS YEAR GET INTO THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL SCOT-FREE.

FRIDAY, 20th AUGUST – 11.00AM
LIVE from the Queen's Hall
Schubert Lieder and piano music by Janacek
Robert Holl – *Baritone*
Andras Schiff – *Piano*

FRIDAY, 27TH AUGUST – 11.00AM
LIVE from the Queen's Hall
Schubert – Quartettsatz and Quartet in G
Janacek – Quartet No 1 'Kreutzer Sonata'
Carmina Quartet

SATURDAY, 28TH AUGUST – 2.40PM
A rare chance to hear Verdi's first opera 'Oberto'
Royal Scottish National Orchestra
Edinburgh Festival Chorus
Sir Edward Downes – *Conductor*
Cast includes Dennis O'Neill
(recorded at the Usher Hall on 26th August)

SUNDAY, 29TH AUGUST – 1.20PM
Janacek – Suite 'The Cunning Little Vixen' and 'Amarus'
Schubert – Mass No 5 in A flat
Royal Scottish National Orchestra
Edinburgh Festival Chorus
Walter Weller – *Conductor*
Soloists include Yvonne Kenny and Andreas Schmidt
(recorded at the Usher Hall on 15th August)

SUNDAY, 29TH AUGUST – 5.00PM
Music by Roberto Gerhard
Orquestra de Cambra Teatre Lliure from Barcelona
Josep Pons – *Conductor*
Josep Benet – *Tenor*
(recorded at the Queen's Hall on 23rd August)

SUNDAY, 29TH AUGUST – 10.55PM
Music by the featured Festival composer James MacMillan
The Chamber Group of Scotland
James MacMillan – *Conductor*
Graeme McNaught – *Piano*
(recorded at the Queen's Hall on 17th August)

MONDAY, 30TH AUGUST – 11.00AM
LIVE from the Queen's Hall
Janacek – Mladi and Concertino
Schubert – Octet
Gaudier Ensemble
Susan Tomes – *Piano*

MONDAY, 13TH SEPTEMBER – 7.30PM
Janacek – Sarka
Schubert – Die Freunde von Salamanka
BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra
David Robertson – *Conductor*
Cast includes Joan Rodgers and Rebecca Evans
(recorded at the Usher Hall on 24th August)

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